Volume XVIII

WESSEX POEMS AND OTHER VERSES

POEMS OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

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POEMS OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

BY

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PREFACE TO WESSEX POEMS

OF the miscellaneous collection of verse that follows, only four pieces have been published, though many were written long ago, and others partly written. In some few cases the verses were turned into prose and printed as such, it having been unanticipated at that time that they might see the light.

Whenever an ancient and legitimate word of the district, for which there was no equivalent in received English, suggested itself as the most natural, nearest, and often only expression of a thought, it has been made use of, on what seemed good grounds.

The pieces are in a large degree dramatic or personative in conception; and this even where they are not obviously so.

The dates attached to some of the poems do not apply to the rough sketches given in illustration, which have been recently made, and, as may be surmised, are inserted for personal and local reasons rather than for their intrinsic qualities.

T. H.

September 1898.

PREFACE TO POEMS OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

HEREWITH I tender my thanks to the editors and proprietors of the *Times*, the *Morning Post*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Westminster Gazette*, *Literature*, the *Graphic*, *Cornhill*, *Sphere*, and other papers, for permission to reprint from their pages such of the following pieces of verse as have already been published.

Of the subject-matter of this volume which is in other than narrative form, much is dramatic or impersonative even where not explicitly so. Moreover, that portion which

may be regarded as individual comprises a series of feelings and fancies written down in widely differing moods and circumstances, and at various dates. It will probably be found, therefore, to possess little cohesion of thought or harmony of colouring. I do not greatly regret this. Unadjusted impressions have their value, and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change.

T. H.

August 1901.

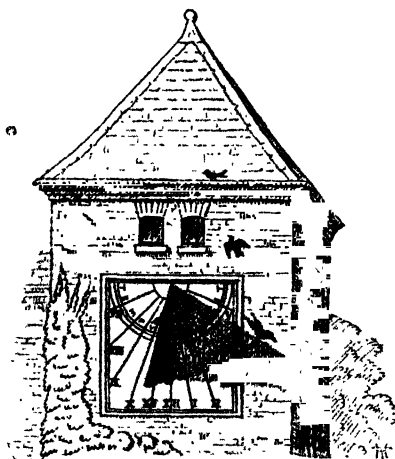
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POEMS OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS—

WESSEX POEMS



THE TEMPORARY THE ALL

SAPPHICS

CHANGE and chancefulness in my
flowering youthtime,
Set me sun by sun near to one unchosen ;
Wrought us fellow-like, and despite divergence,
Friends interlinked us.

"Cherish him can I while the true one forth-
come—
Come the rich fulfiller of my prevision;
Life is roomy yet, and the odds unbounded."
So self-communed I.

Thwart my wistful way did a damsel saunter,
Fair, the while unformed to be all-eclipsing;
"Maiden meet," held I, "till arise my forefelt
Wonder of women."

Long a visioned hermitage deep desiring,
Tenements uncouth I was fain to house in;
"Let such lodging be for a breath-while," thought I,
"Soon a more seemly.

"Then, high handiwork will I make my life-deed,
Truth and Light outshow; but the ripe time pending,
Intermissive aim at the thing sufficeth."
Thus I . . . But lo, me!

Mistress, friend, place, aims to be bettered
straightway,
Bettered not has Fate or my hand's achieving ;
Sole the showance those of my onward earth-
track—
Never transcended !

AMABEL

I MARKED her ruined hues,
Her custom-straitened views,
And asked, "Can there indwell
My Amabel?"

I looked upon her gown,
Once rose, now earthen brown;
The change was like the knell
Of Amabel.

Her step's mechanic ways
Had lost the life of May's ;
Her laugh, once sweet in swell,
        Spoilt Amabel.

I mused : "Who sings the strain
I sang ere warmth did wane ?
Who thinks its numbers spell
        His Amabel ?"—

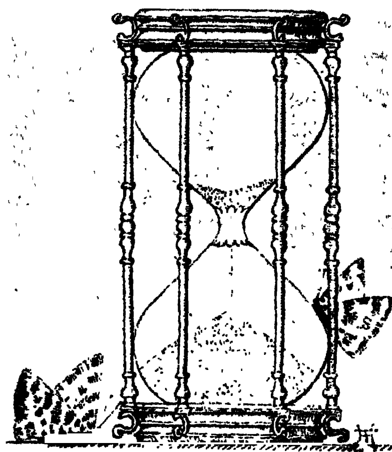
Knowing that, though Love cease,
Love's race shows no decrease ;
All find in dorp or dell
        An Amabel.

—I felt that I could creep
To some housetop, and weep,
That Time the tyrant fell
        Ruled Amabel !

I said (the while I sighed
That love like ours had died),
"Fond things I'll no more tell
        To Amabel,

"But leave her to her fate,
And fling across the gate,
'Till the Last Trump, farewell,
O Amabel!'"

1865.



HAP

IF but some vengeful god would call to me
From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!"

Then would I bear, and clench myself, and die,
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown ?
—Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

1866.

"IN VISION I ROAMED"

TO ——

IN vision I roamed the flashing Firmament,
So fierce in blazon that the Night waxed wan,
As though with an awed sense of such ostent;
And as I thought my spirit ranged on and on

In footless traverse through ghast heights of sky,
To the last chambers of the monstrous Dome,
Where stars the brightest here to darkness die:
Then, any spot on our own Earth seemed
Home!

And the sick grief that you were far away
Grew pleasant thankfulness that you were near,
Who might have been, set on some outstep
    sphere,
Less than a Want to me, as day by day
I lived unware, uncaring all that lay
Locked in that Universe taciturn and drear.

1866

AT A BRIDAL

TO ——

WHEN you paced forth, to wait maternity,
A dream of other offspring held my mind,
Compounded of us twain as Love designed;
Rare forms, that corporate now will never be!

Should I, too, wed as slave to Mode's decree,
And each thus found apart, of false desire,
A stolid line, whom no high aims will fire
As had fired ours could ever have mingled we;

And, grieved that lives so matched should mis-
compose,
Each mourn the double waste; and question
dare
To the Great Dame whence incarnation flows,
Why those high-purposed children never were:
What will she answer? That she does not
care
If the race all such sovereign types unknows.

1866.

POSTPONEMENT

SNOW-BOUND in woodland, a mournful word,
Dropt now and then from the bill of a bird,
Reached me on wind-wafts; and thus I heard,
Wearily waiting:—

"I planned her a nest in a leafless tree,
But the passers eyed and twitted me,
And said: 'How reckless a bird is he,
Cheerily mating!'

"Fear-filled, I stayed me till summer-tide,
In lewth of leaves to throne her bride ;
But alas ! her love for me waned and died,
Wearily waiting.

"Ah, had I been like some I see,
Born to an evergreen nesting-tree,
None had eyed and twitted me,
Cheerily mating !"

1866.

A CONFESSION TO A FRIEND IN TROUBLE

YOUR troubles shrink not, though I feel them less
Here, far away, than when I tarried near;
I even smile old smiles—with listlessness—
Yet smiles they are, not ghastly mockeries mere.

A thought too strange to house within my brain
Haunting its outer precincts I discern:
—That I will not show zeal again to learn
Your griefs, and, sharing them, renew my pain....

It goes, like murky bird or buccaneer
That shapes its lawless figure on the main,
And staunchness tends to banish utterly
The unseemly instinct that had lodgment here;
Yet, comrade old, can bitterer knowledge be
Than that, though banned, such instinct was
in me!

1866.

NEUTRAL TONES

WE stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod,
—They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles of years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro—
On which lost the more by our love.

The smile on your mouth was the deadest
 thing
Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
 Like an ominous bird a-wing. . . .

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
 And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

1867.



SHE

AT HIS FUNERAL

THEY bear him to his resting-place—
  In slow procession sweeping by;
I follow at a stranger's space;
His kindred they, his sweetheart I.
Unchanged my gown of garish dye,
Though sable-sad is their attire;
But they stand round with griefless eye,
Whilst my regret consumes like fire!

187–.



HER INITIALS

UPON a poet's page I wrote
Of old two letters of her name;
Part seemed she of the effulgent thought
Whence that high singer's rapture came.
—When now I turn the leaf the same
Immortal light illumes the lay,
But from the letters of her name
The radiance has died away!

1869.

HER DILEMMA

(IN —— CHURCH)

THE two were silent in a sunless church,
Whose mildewed walls, uneven paving-
stones,
And wasted carvings passed antique research;
And nothing broke the clock's dull mono-
tones.

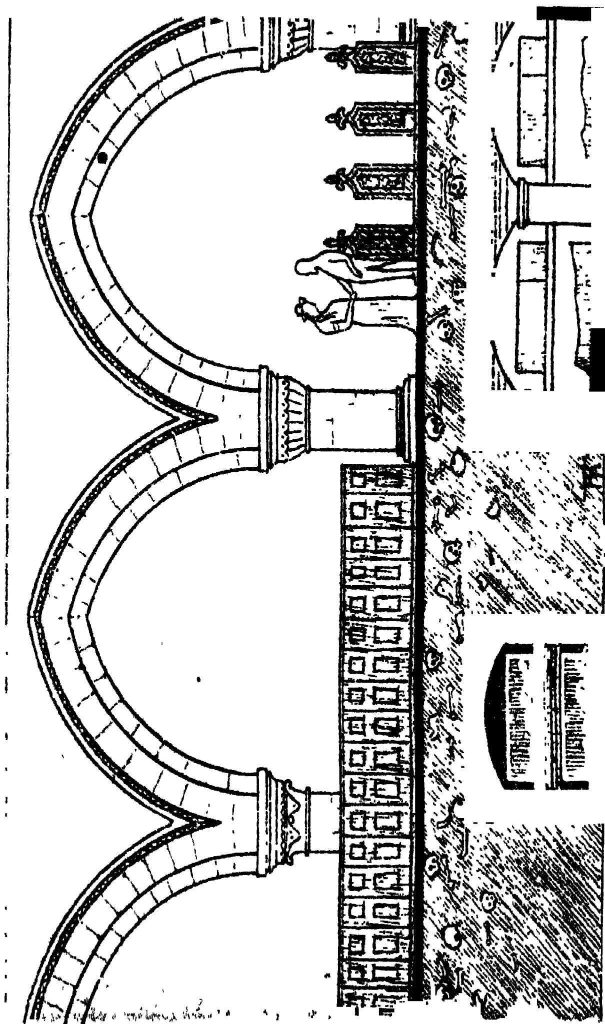
Leaning against a wormy poppy-head,
So wan and worn that he could scarcely
stand,

—For he was soon to die,—he softly said,
"Tell me you love me!"—holding hard her
hand.

She would have given a world to breathe
"yes" truly,
So much his life seemed hanging on her
mind,
And hence she lied, her heart persuaded
throughly
'Twas worth her soul to be a moment kind.

But the sad need thereof, his nearing death,
So mocked humanity that she shamed to prize
A world conditioned thus, or care for breath
Where Nature such dilemmas could devise.

1866.



REVULSION

THOUGH I waste watches framing words
to fetter
Some spirit to mine own in clasp and kiss,
Out of the night there looms a sense 'twere
better
To fail obtaining whom one fails to miss.

For winning love we win the risk of losing,
And losing love is as one's life were riven;
It cuts like contumely and keen ill-using
To cede what was superfluously given.

Let me then feel no more the fateful thrilling
That devastates the love-worn wooer's frame,
The hot ado of fevered hopes, the chilling
That agonizes disappointed aim !
So may I live no junctive law fulfilling,
And my heart's table bear no woman's name.

1866.



SHE, TO HIM

I

WHEN you shall see me in the toils of Time,
My lauded beauties carried off from me,
My eyes no longer stars as in their prime,
My name forgot of Maiden Fair and Free;

When in your being heart concedes to mind,
And judgment, though you scarce its process know,
Recalls the excellencies I once enshrined,
And you are irked that they have withered so:

Remembering that with me lies not the blame,
That Sportsman Time but rears his brood to kill,
Knowing me in my soul the very same—
One who would die to spare you touch of ill!—
Will you not grant to old affection's claim
The hand of friendship down Life's sunless hill?

1866.

SHE, TO HIM

II

PERHAPS, long hence, when I have
passed away,
Some other's feature, accent, thought like mine,
Will carry you back to what I used to say,
And bring some memory of your love's decline.

Then you may pause awhile and think, "Poor
jade!"
And yield a sigh to me—as ample due,
Not as the tittle of a debt unpaid
To one who could resign her all to you—

And thus reflecting, you will never see
That your thin thought, in two small words
conveyed,
Was no such fleeting phantom-thought to me,
But the Whole Life wherein my part was
played;
And you amid its fitful masquerade
A Thought—as I in yours but seem to be.

1866.

SHE, TO HIM

III

I WILL be faithful to thee; aye, I will!
And Death shall choose me with a wondering eye
That he did not discern and domicile
One his by right ever since that last Good-bye.

I have no care for friends, or kin, or prime
Of manhood who deal gently with me here;
Amid the happy people of my time
Who work their love's fulfilment, I appear

Numb as a vane that cankers on its point,
True to the wind that kissed ere canker came;
Despised by souls of Now, who would dis-
    joint
The mind from memory, and make Life all
    aim,

My old dexterities of hue quite gone,
And nothing left for Love to look upon.

1866.

SHE, TO HIM

IV

THIS love puts all humanity from me;
I can but maledict her, pray her dead,
For giving love and getting love of thee—
Feeding a heart that else mine own had fed!

How much I love I know not, life not known,
Save as some unit I would add love by;
But this I know, my being is but thine own—
Fused from its separateness by ecstasy.

And thus I grasp thy amplitudes, of her
Ungrasped, though helped by nigh-regarding
    eyes;
Canst thou then hate me as an envier
Who see unrecked what I so dearly prize?
Believe me, Lost One, Love is lovelier
The more it shapes its moan in selfish-wise.

1866.

DITTY

(E. L. G.)

BENEATH a knap where flown
Nestlings play,
Within walls of weathered stone,
Far away
From the files of formal houses,
By the bough the firstling browses,
Lives a Sweet: no merchants meet,
No man barters, no man sells
Where she dwells.

Upon that fabric fair
"Here is she!"
Seems written everywhere
Unto me.
But to friends and nodding neighbours,
Fellow-wights in lot and labours,
Who descry the times as I,
No such lucid legend tells
Where she dwells.

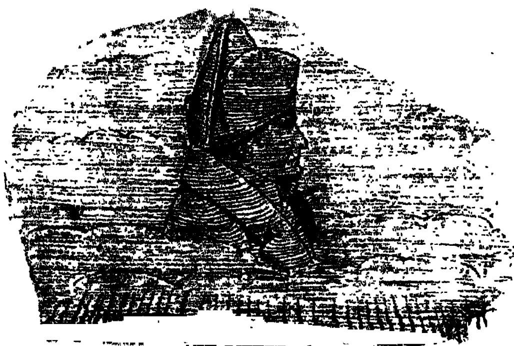
Should I lapse to what I was
Ere we met;
(Such can not be, but because
Some forget
Let me feign it)—none would notice
That where she I know by rote is
Spread a strange and withering change,
Like a drying of the wells
Where she dwells.

To feel I might have kissed—
Loved as true—
Otherwhere, nor Mine have missed
My life through.

Had I never wandered near her,
Is a smart severe—severer
In the thought that she is nought,
Even as I, beyond the dells
Where she dwells.

And Devotion droops her glance
To recall
What bond-servants of Chance
We are all.
I but found her in that, going
On my errant path unknowing,
I did not out-skirt the spot
That no spot on earth excels,
—Where she dwells!

1870.



THE SERGEANT'S SONG

(1803)

WHEN Lawyers strive to heal a breach,
And Parsons practise what they preach;
Then Little Boney he'll pounce down,
And march his men on London town!
Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lorum,
Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lay!

When Justices hold equal scales,
And Rogues are only found in jails:

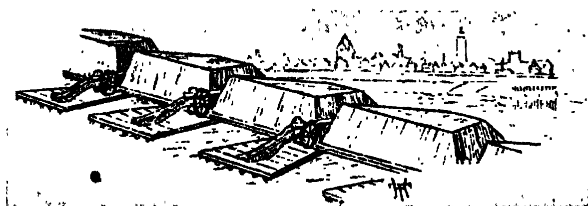
Then Little Boney he'll pounce down,
And march his men on London town!
Rollicum-rorum, &c.

When Rich Men find their wealth a curse,
And fill therewith the Poor Man's purse;
Then Little Boney he'll pounce down,
And march his men on London town!
Rollicum-rorum, &c.

When Husbands with their Wives agree,
And Maids won't wed from modesty;
Then Little Boney he'll pounce down,
And march his men on London town!
Rollicum-rorum, tol-tol-lorum,
Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lay!

1878.

Published in "The Trumpet-Major," 1880.



VALENCIENNES

(1793)

BY CORP'L TULLIDGE: *see "The Trumpet-Major"*

IN MEMORY OF S. C. (PENSIONER). DIED 184–

WE trenched, we trumpeted and
drummed,
And from our mortars tons of iron
hummed
Ath'art the ditch, the month we bombed
The Town o' Valencieën.

'Twas in the June o' Ninety-dree
(The Duke o' Yark our then Commander beën)
The German Legion, Guards, and we
Laid siege to Valencieën.

This was the first time in the war
That French and English spilled each other's gore;
—Few dreamt how far would roll the roar
Begun at Valencieën!

'Twas said that we'd no business there
A-topperèn the French for disagreën;
However, that's not my affair—
We were at Valencieën.

Such snocks and slats, since war began
Never knew raw recruit or veteràn:
Stone-deaf therence went many a man
Who served at Valencieën.

Into the streets, ath'art the sky,
A hundred thousand balls and bombs were fleën;
And harmless townsfolk fell to die
Each hour at Valencieën!

And, sweatèn wi' the bombardiers,
A shell was slent to shards anighst my ears:
—'Twas nigh the end of hopes and fears
For me at Valencieën!

They bore my wownded frame to camp,
And shut my gapèn skull, and washed en cleän,
And jined en wi' a zilver clamp
Thik night at Valencieën.

"We've fetched en back to quick from dead;
But never more on earth while rose is red
Will drum rouse Corpel!" Doctor said
O' me at Valencieën.

'Twer true. No voice o' friend or foe
Can reach me now, or any livèn beën;
And little have I power to know
Since then at Valencieën!

I never hear the zummer hums
O' bees; and don' know when the cuckoo comes;
But night and day I hear the bombs
We threw at Valencieën. . . .

As for the Duke o' Yark in war,
There be some volk whose judgment o' en is meän;
But this I say—a was not far
From great at Valencieën.

O' wild wet nights, when all seems sad,
My wownds come back, as though new wownds I'd had;
But yet—at times I'm sort o' glad
I fout at Valencieën.

Well: Heaven wi' its jasper halls
Is now the on'y Town I care to be in. . . .
Good Lord, if Nick should bomb the walls
As we did Valencieën!

1878–1897.

SAN SEBASTIAN

(*August* 1813)

WITH THOUGHTS OF SERGEANT M—— (PENSIONER), WHO DIED 185-

"WHY, Sergeant, stray on the Ivel
 Way,
As though at home there were spectres
 rife?
From first to last 'twas a proud career!
And your sunny years with a gracious wife
 Have brought you a daughter dear.

"I watched her to-day ; a more comely maid,
As she danced in her muslin bowed with blue,
Round a Hintock maypole never gayed."
—"Aye, aye ; I watched her this day, too,
As it happens," the Sergeant said.

"My daughter is now," he again began,
"Of just such an age as one I knew
When we of the Line and Forlorn-hope van,
On an August morning—a chosen few—
Stormed San Sebastian.

"She's a score less three ; so about was *she*—
The maiden I wronged in Peninsular days. . . .
You may prate of your prowess in lusty times,
But as years gnaw inward you blink your bays,
And see too well your crimes !

"We'd stormed it at night, by the vlanker-light
Of burning towers, and the mortar's boom :
We'd topped the breach ; but had failed to stay,
For our files were misled by the baffling gloom ;
And we said we'd storm by day.



"So, out of the trenches, with features set,
On that hot, still morning, in measured pace,
Our column climbed; climbed higher yet,
Past the fauss'bray, scarp, up the curtain-face,
And along the parapet.

"From the batteried hornwork the cannoneers
Hove crashing balls of iron fire;
On the shaking gap mount the volunteers
In files, and as they mount expire
Amid curses, groans, and cheers.

"Five hours did we storm, five hours re-form,
As Death cooled those hot blood pricked on;
Till our cause was helped by a woe within:
They swayed from the summit we'd leapt
upon,
And madly we entered in.

"On end for plunder, 'mid rain and thunder
That burst with the lull of our cannonade,
We vamped the streets in the stifling air—
Our hunger unsoothed, our thirst unstayed—
And ransacked the buildings there.

"Down the stony steps of the house-fronts
white
We rolled rich puncheons of Spanish grape,
Till at length, with the fire of the wine alight,
I saw at a doorway a fair fresh shape—
A woman, a sylph, or sprite.

"Afeard she fled, and with heated head
I pursued to the chamber she called her
own ;
—When might is right no qualms deter,
And having her helpless and alone
I wreaked my will on her.

"She raised her beseeching eyes to me,
And I heard the words of prayer she sent
In her own soft language. . . . Seemingly
I copied those eyes for my punishment
In begetting the girl you see!

"So, to-day I stand with a God-set brand
Like Cain's, when he wandered from kindred's
ken. . . .

I served through the war that made Europe
free ;
I wived me in peace-year. But, hid from men,
I bear that mark on me.

"And I nightly stray on the Ivel Way
As though at home there were spectres rife ;
I delight me not in my proud career ;
And 'tis coals of fire that a gracious wife
Should have brought me a daughter
dear!"

THE STRANGER'S SONG

(*As sung by* MR. CHARLES CHARRINGTON *in the play of "The Three Wayfarers"*)

O MY trade it is the rarest one,
Simple shepherds all—
My trade is a sight to see;
For my customers I tie, and take 'em up on high,
And waft 'em to a far countree!

My tools are but common ones,
Simple shepherds all—

My tools are no sight to see :
A little hempen string, and a post whereon to
swing,
Are implements enough for me !

To-morrow is my working day,
Simple shepherds all—
To-morrow is a working day for me :
For the farmer's sheep is slain, and the lad
who did it ta'en,
And on his soul may God ha' mer-cy!

Printed in "The Three Strangers," 1883



THE BURGHERS

(17—)

THE sun had wheeled from Grey's to
Dammer's Crest,
And still I mused on that Thing imminent:
At length I sought the High-street to the
West.

The level flare raked pane and pediment
And my wrecked face, and shaped my nearing friend
Like one of those the Furnace held unshent.

"I've news concerning her," he said. "Attend.
They fly to-night at the late moon's first gleam:
Watch with thy steel: two righteous thrusts will end

Her shameless visions and his passioned dream.
I'll watch with thee, to testify thy wrong—
To aid, maybe.—Law consecrates the scheme."

I started, and we paced the flags along
Till I replied: "Since it has come to this
I'll do it! But alone. I can be strong."

Three hours past Curfew, when the Froom's mild hiss
Reigned sole, undulled by whirr of merchandize,
From Pummery-Tout to where the Gibbet is,

I crossed my pleasaunce hard by Glyd'path
Rise,
And stood beneath the wall. Eleven strokes
went,
And to the door they came, contrariwise,

And met in clasp so close I had but bent
My lifted blade upon them to have let
Their two souls loose upon the firmament.

But something held my arm. "A moment
yet
As pray-time ere you wantons die!" I said;
And then they saw me. Swift her gaze was
set

With eye and cry of love illimited
Upon her Heart-king. Never upon me
Had she thrown look of love so thorough-
sped! . . .

At once she flung her faint form shieldingly
On his, against the vengeance of my vows;
The which o'erruling, her shape shielded he.

Blanked by such love, I stood as in a
drowse,
And the slow moon edged from the upland
nigh,
My sad thoughts moving thuswise: "I may
house

And I may husband her, yet what am I
But licensed tyrant to this bonded pair?
Says Charity, Do as ye would be done by." . . .

Hurling my iron to the bushes there,
I bade them stay. And, as if brain and
breast
Were passive, they walked with me to the
stair.

Inside the house none watched; and on we
prest
Before a mirror, in whose gleam I read
Her beauty, his,—and mine own mien un-
blest;

Till at her room I turned. "Madam," I
 said,
"Have you the wherewithal for this? Pray
 speak.
Love fills no cupboard. You'll need daily
 bread."

"We've nothing, sire," said she; "and nothing
 seek.
'Twere base in me to rob my lord unware;
Our hands will earn a pittance week by
 week."

And next I saw she'd piled her raiment rare
Within the garde-robes, and her household
 purse,
Her jewels, and least lace of personal wear;

And stood in homespun. Now grown wholly
 hers,
I handed her the gold, her jewels all,
And him the choicest of her robes diverse.

"I'll take you to the doorway in the wall,
And then adieu," I to them. "Friends, with-
draw."
They did so; and she went—beyond recall.

And as I paused beneath the arch I saw
Their moonlit figures—slow, as in surprise—
Descend the slope, and vanish on the haw.

"'Fool,' some will say," I thought. "But
who is wise,
Save God alone, to weigh my reasons why?"
—"Hast thou struck home?" came with the
boughs' night-sighs.

It was my friend. "I have struck well.
They fly,
But carry wounds that none can cicatrize."
—"Not mortal?" said he. "Lingering—
worse," said I.

LEIPZIG

(1813)

Scene: The Master-tradesmen's Parlour at the Old Ship Inn, Casterbridge. Evening.

"OLD Norbert with the flat blue cap—
  A German said to be—
Why let your pipe die on your lap,
  Your eyes blink absently?"—

—"Ah! . . . Well, I had thought till my cheek
    was wet
  Of my mother—her voice and mien
When she used to sing and pirouette,
  And touse the tambourine

"To the march that yon street-fiddler plies:
She told me 'twas the same
She'd heard from the trumpets, when the Allies
Her city overcame.

"My father was one of the German Hussars,
My mother of Leipzig; but he,
Long quartered here, fetched her at close of the wars,
And a Wessex lad reared me.

"And as I grew up, again and again
She'd tell, after trilling that air,
Of her youth, and the battles on Leipzig plain
And of all that was suffered there! . . .

"—'Twas a time of alarms. Three Chiefs-at-arms
Combined them to crush One,
And by numbers' might, for in equal fight
He stood the matched of none.

"Carl Schwarzenberg was of the plot,
And Blücher, prompt and prow,
And Jean the Crown-Prince Bernadotte:
Buonaparte was the foe.

"City and plain had felt his reign
From the North to the Middle Sea,
And he'd now sat down in the noble town
Of the King of Saxony.

"October's deep dew its wet gossamer threw
Upon Leipzig's lawns, leaf-strewn,
Where lately each fair avenue
Wrought shade for summer noon.

"To westward two dull rivers crept
Through miles of marsh and slough,
Whereover a streak of whiteness swept—
The Bridge of Lindenau.

"Hard by, in the City, the One, care-tossed,
Gloomed over his shrunken power;
And without the walls the hemming host
Waxed denser every hour.

"He had speech that night on the morrow's
designs
With his chiefs by the bivouac fire,
While the belt of flames from the enemy's
lines
Flared nigher him yet and nigher.

"Three sky-lights then from the girdling
trine
Told, 'Ready!' As they rose
Their flashes seemed his Judgment-Sign
For bleeding Europe's woes.

"'Twas seen how the French watch-fires that
night
Glowed still and steadily;
And the Three rejoiced, for they read in the
sight
That the One disdained to flee. . . .

"—Five hundred guns began the affray
On next day morn at nine;
Such mad and mangling cannon-play
Had never torn human line.

"Around the town three battles beat,
Contracting like a gin;
As nearer marched the million feet
Of columns closing in.

"The first battle nighed on the low Southern side;
The second by the Western way;
The nearing of the third on the North was heard:
—The French held all at bay.

"Against the first band did the Emperor stand;
Against the second stood Ney;
Marmont against the third gave the order-word:
—Thus raged it throughout the day.

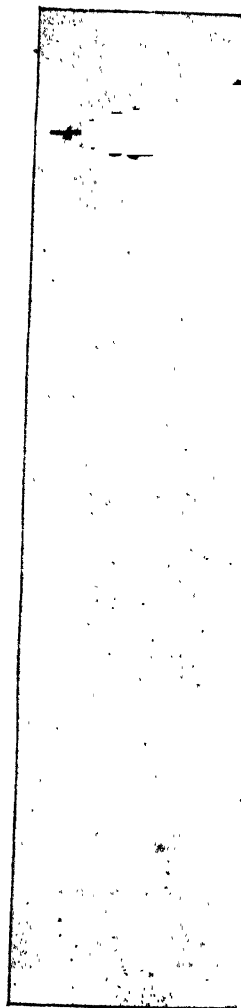
"Fifty thousand sturdy souls on those trampled plains and knolls,
Who met the dawn hopefully,
And were lotted their shares in a quarrel not theirs,
Dropt then in their agony.

"'O,' the old folks said, 'ye Preachers stern!
O so-called Christian time!
When will men's swords to ploughshares turn?
When come the promised prime?' . . .

"—The clash of horse and man which that day began,
Closed not as evening wore;
And the morrow's armies, rear and van,
Still mustered more and more.

"From the City towers the Confederate Powers
Were eyed in glittering lines,
And up from the vast a murmuring passed
As from a wood of pines.

"''Tis well to cover a feeble skill
By numbers!' scoffèd He;
'But give me a third of their strength, I'd fill
Half Hell with their soldiery!'



"All that day raged the war they waged,
And again dumb night held reign,
Save that ever upspread from the dark death-bed
A miles-wide pant of pain.

"Hard had striven brave Ney, the true Bertrand,
Victor, and Augereau,
Bold Poniatowski, and Lauriston,
To stay their overthrow;

"But, as in the dream of one sick to death
There comes a narrowing room
That pens him, body and limbs and breath,
To wait a hideous doom,

"So to Napoleon, in the hush
That held the town and towers
Through these dire nights, a creeping crush
Seemed inborne with the hours.

"One road to the rearward, and but one,
Did fitful Chance allow ;
'Twas where the Pleiss' and Elster run—
The Bridge of Lindenau.

"The nineteenth dawned. Down street and Platz
The wasted French sank back,
Stretching long lines across the Flats
And on the bridge-way track ;

"When there surged on the sky an earthen wave,
And stones, and men, as though
Some rebel churchyard crew updrave
Their sepulchres from below.

"To Heaven is blown Bridge Lindenau ;
Wrecked regiments reel therefrom ;
And rank and file in masses plough
The sullen Elster-Strom.

"A gulf was Lindenau ; and dead
Were fifties, hundreds, tens ;
And every current rippled red
With Marshal's blood and men's.

"The smart Macdonald swam therein,
And barely won the verge ;
Bold Poniatowski plunged him in
Never to re-emerge.

"Then stayed the strife. The remnants wound
Their Rhineward way pell-mell ;
And thus did Leipzig City sound
An Empire's passing bell ;

"While in cavalcade, with band and blade,
Came Marshals, Princes, Kings ;
And the town was theirs. . . . Ay, as simple maid,
My mother saw these things !

"And whenever those notes in the street
begin,
I recall her, and that far scene,
And her acting of how the Allies marched in,
And her touse of the tambourine!"

THE PEASANT'S CONFESSION

"Si le maréchal Grouchy avait été rejoint par l'officier que Napoléon lui avait expédié la veille à dix heures du soir, toute question eût disparu. Mais cet officier n'etait point parvenu à sa destination, ainsi que le maréchal n'a cessé de l'affirmer toute sa vie, et il faut l'en croire, car autrement il n'aurait eu aucune raison pour hésiter. Cet officier avait-il été pris? avait-il passé à l'ennemi? C'est ce qu'on a toujours ignoré."

— THIERS: *Histoire de l'Empire.* "Waterloo."

GOOD Father! . . . 'Twas an eve in
middle June,
And war was waged anew
By great Napoleon, who for years had strewn
Men's bones all Europe through.

Three nights ere this, with columned corps
he'd crossed
The Sambre at Charleroi,
To move on Brussels, where the English host
Dallied in Parc and Bois.

The yestertide we'd heard the gloomy gun
Growl through the long-sunned day
From Quatre-Bras and Ligny; till the dun
Twilight suppressed the fray;

Albeit therein—as lated tongues bespoke—
Brunswick's high heart was drained,
And Prussia's Line and Landwehr, though
unbroke,
Stood cornered and constrained.

And at next noon-time Grouchy slowly passed
With thirty thousand men:
We hoped thenceforth no army, small or
vast,
Would trouble us again.

My hut lay deeply in a vale recessed,
And never a soul seemed nigh
When, reassured at length, we went to rest—
My children, wife, and I.

But what was this that broke our humble ease?
What noise, above the rain,
Above the dripping of the poplar trees
That smote along the pane?

—A call of mastery, bidding me arise,
Compelled me to the door,
At which a horseman stood in martial guise—
Splashed—sweating from every pore.

Had I seen Grouchy? Yes? Which track took he?
Could I lead thither on?—
Fulfilment would ensure gold pieces three,
Perchance more gifts anon.

"I bear the Emperor's mandate," then he
said,
"Charging the Marshal straight
To strike between the double host ahead
Ere they co-operate,

"Engaging Blücher till the Emperor put
Lord Wellington to flight,
And next the Prussians. This to set afoot
Is my emprise to-night."

I joined him in the mist; but, pausing, sought
To estimate his say.
Grouchy had made for Wavre; and yet, on
thought,
I did not lead that way.

I mused: "If Grouchy thus instructed be,
The clash comes sheer hereon;
My farm is stript. While, as for pieces
three,
Money the French have none.

"Grouchy unwarned, moreo'er, the English
win,
And mine is left to me—
They buy, not borrow."—Hence did I begin
To lead him treacherously.

By Joidoigne, near to east, as we ondrew,
Dawn pierced the humid air;
And eastward faced I with him, though I knew
Never marched Grouchy there.

Near Ottignies we passed, across the Dyle
(Lim'lette left far aside),
And thence direct toward Pervez and Noville
Through green grain, till he cried:

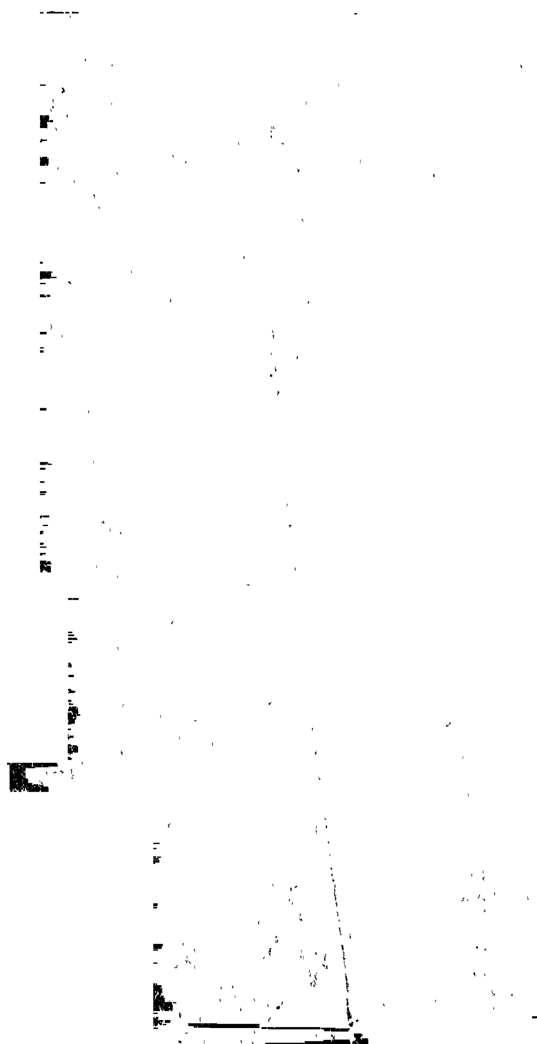
"I doubt thy conduct, man! no track is
here—
I doubt thy gagèd word!"
Thereat he scowled on me, and pranced me
near,
And pricked me with his sword.

"Nay, Captain, hold! We skirt, not trace the course
Of Grouchy," said I then:
"As we go, yonder went he, with his force
Of thirty thousand men."

—At length noon nighed; when west, from Saint-John's-Mound,
A hoarse artillery boomed,
And from Saint-Lambert's upland, chapel-crowned,
The Prussian squadrons loomed.

Then to the wayless wet gray ground he leapt;
"My mission fails!" he cried;
"Too late for Grouchy now to intercept,
For, peasant, you have lied!"

He turned to pistol me. I sprang, and drew
The sabre from his flank,
And 'twixt his nape and shoulder, ere he knew.
I struck, and dead he sank.



I hid him deep in nodding rye and oat—
His shroud green stalks and loam;
His requiem the corn-blade's husky note—
And then I hastened home. . . .

—Two armies writhe in coils of red and blue,
And brass and iron clang
From Goumont, past the front of Waterloo,
To Pap'lotte and Smohain.

The Guard Imperial wavered on the height;
The Emperor's face grew glum;
"I sent," he said, "to Grouchy yesternight,
And yet he does not come!"

'Twas then, Good Father, that the French espied,
Streaking the summer land,
The men of Blücher. But the Emperor cried,
"Grouchy is now at hand!"

And meanwhile Vand'leur, Vivian, Maitland,
Kempt,
Met d'Erlon, Friant, Ney;
But Grouchy—mis-sent, blamed, yet blame-
exempt—
Grouchy was far away.

By even, slain or struck, Michel the strong,
Bold Travers, Dnop, Delord,
Smart Guyot, Reil-le, l'Heriter, Friant,
Scattered that champaign o'er.

Fallen likewise wronged Duhesme, and skilled
Lobau
Did that red sunset see;
Colbert, Legros, Blancard! . . . . And of
the foe
Picton and Ponsonby;

With Gordon, Canning, Blackman, Ompteda,
L'Estrange, Delancey, Packe,
Grose, D'Oyly, Stables, Morice, Howard, Hay,
Von Schwerin, Watzdorf, Boek,

Smith, Phelips, Fuller, Lind, and Battersby,
And hosts of ranksmen round . . . . .
Memorials linger yet to speak to thee
Of those that bit the ground!

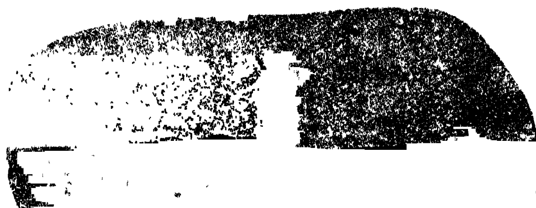
The Guards' last column yielded; dykes of dead
Lay between vale and ridge,
As, thinned yet closing, faint yet fierce, they sped
In packs to Genappe Bridge.

Safe was my stock; my capple cow unslain;
Intact each cock and hen;
But Grouchy far at Wavre all day had lain,
And thirty thousand men.

O Saints, had I but lost my earing corn
And saved the cause once prized!
O Saints, why such false witness had I borne
When late I'd sympathized! . . .

So now, being old, my children eye askance
My slowly dwindling store,
And crave my mite ; till, worn with tarriance,
I care for life no more.

To Almighty God henceforth I stand confessed,
And Virgin-Saint Marie ;
O Michael, John, and Holy Ones in rest,
Entreat the Lord for me !



THE ALARM

(1803)

See "The Trumpet-Major"

In Memory of one of the Writer's Family who was a Volunteer during the War with Napoleon

In a ferny byway
Near the great South-Wessex Highway,
A homestead raised its breakfast-smoke aloft;
The dew-damps still lay steamless, for the sun had made no sky-way,
And twilight cloaked the croft.

'Twas hard to realize on
This snug side the mute horizon
That beyond it hostile armaments might steer,
Save from seeing in the porchway a fair woman weep with eyes on
A harnessed Volunteer.

In haste he'd flown there
To his comely wife alone there,
While marching south hard by, to still her fears,
For she soon would be a mother, and few messengers were known there
In these campaigning years.

'Twas time to be Good-bying,
Since the assembly-hour was nighing
In royal George's town at six that morn;
And betwixt its wharves and this retreat were ten good miles of hieing
Ere ring of bugle-horn.

"I've laid in food, Dear,
And broached the spiced and brewed,
Dear;
And if our July hope should antedate,
Let the char-wench mount and gallop by the
halterpath and wood, Dear,
And fetch assistance straight.

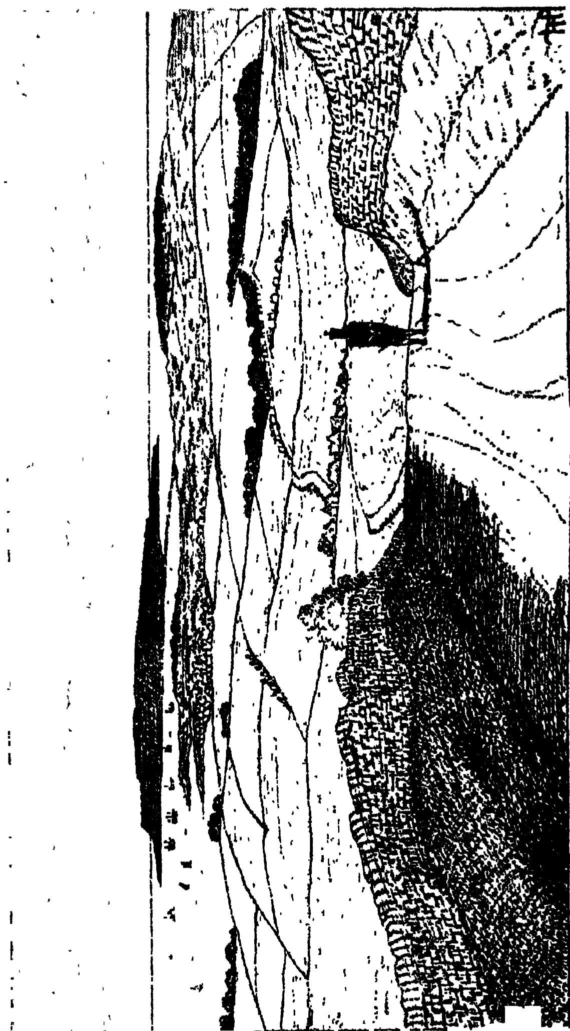
"As for Buonaparte, forget him;
He's not like to land! But let him,
Those strike with aim who strike for wives
and sons!
And the war-boats built to float him; 'twere
but wanted to upset him
A slat from Nelson's guns!

"But, to assure thee,
And of creeping fears to cure thee,
If he *should* be rumoured anchoring in the
Road,
Drive with the nurse to Kingsbere; and let
nothing thence allure thee
Till we've him safe-bestowed.

"Now, to turn to marching matters:—
I've my knapsack, firelock, spatters,
Crossbelts, priming-horn, stock, bay'net, blackball, clay,
Pouch, magazine, flints, flint-box that at every quick-step clatters;
. . . My heart, Dear; that must stay!"

—With breathings broken
Farewell was kissed unspoken,
And they parted there as morning stroked the panes;
And the Volunteer went on, and turned, and twirled his glove for token,
And took the coastward lanes.

When above He'th Hills he found him,
He saw, on gazing round him,
The Barrow-Beacon burning—burning low,
As if, perhaps, uplighted ever since he'd homeward bound him;
And it meant: Expect the Foe!



Leaving the byway,
And following swift the highway,
Car and chariot met he, faring fast inland;
"He's anchored, Soldier!" shouted some: "God save thee, marching thy way,
Th'lt front him on the strand!"

He slowed; he stopped; he paltered
Awhile with self, and faltered,
"Why courting misadventure shoreward roam?
To Molly, surely! Seek the woods with her till times have altered;
Charity favours home.

Else, my denying
He would come she'll read as lying—
Think the Barrow-Beacon must have met my eyes—
That my words were not unwareness, but deceit of her, while trying
My life to jeopardize.

"At home is stocked provision,
And to-night, without suspicion,
We might bear it with us to a covert near;
Such sin, to save a childing wife, would earn it Christ's remission,
Though none forgive it here!"

While thus he, thinking,
A little bird, quick drinking
Among the crowfoot tufts the river bore,
Was tangled in their stringy arms, and fluttered, well-nigh sinking,
Near him, upon the moor.

He stepped in, reached, and seized it,
And, preening, had released it
But that a thought of Holy Writ occurred,
And Signs Divine ere battle, till it seemed him Heaven had pleased it
As guide to send the bird.

"O Lord, direct me! . . . .
Doth Duty now expect me
To march a-coast, or guard my weak ones near?
Give this bird a flight according, that I thence know to elect me
The southward or the rear."

He loosed his clasp; when, rising,
The bird—as if surmising—
Bore due to southward, crossing by the Froom,
And Durnover Great-Field and Fort, the soldier clear advising—
Prompted he wist by Whom.

Then on he panted
By grim Mai-Don, and slanted
Up the steep Ridge-way, hearkening betwixt whiles;
Till, nearing coast and harbour, he beheld the shore-line planted
With Foot and Horse for miles.

Mistrusting not the omen,
He gained the beach, where Yeo-
men,
Militia, Fencibles, and Pikemen bold,
With Regulars in thousands, were enmassed
to meet the Foemen,
Whose fleet had not yet shoaled.

Captain and Colonel,
Sere Generals, Ensigns vernal,
Were there; of neighbour-natives, Michel,
Smith,
Meggs, Bingham, Gambier, Cunningham,
roused by the hued nocturnal
Swoop on their land and kith.

But Buonaparte still tarried;
His project had miscarried;
At the last hour, equipped for victory,
The fleet had paused; his subtle combinations
had been parried
By British strategy.

Homeward returning
Anon, no beacons burning,
No alarms, the Volunteer, in modest bliss,
Te Deum sang with wife and friends: "We
praise Thee, Lord, discerning
That Thou hast helped in this!"

HER DEATH AND AFTER

'TWAS a death-bed summons, and forth
I went
By the way of the Western Wall, so drear
On that winter night, and sought a gate—
The home, by Fate,
Of one I had long held dear.

And there, as I paused by her tenement,
And the trees shed on me their rime and hoar,
I thought of the man who had left her lone—
Him who made her his own
When I loved her, long before.

The rooms within had the piteous shine
That home-things wear when there's aught
amiss;
From the stairway floated the rise and fall
Of an infant's call,
Whose birth had brought her to this.

Her life was the price she would pay for that
whine—
For a child by the man she did not love.
"But let that rest for ever," I said,
And bent my tread
To the chamber up above.

She took my hand in her thin white own,
And smiled her thanks—though nigh too
weak—
And made them a sign to leave us there
Then faltered, ere
She could bring herself to speak.

"'Twas to see you before I go—he'll condone
Such a natural thing now my time's not
much—

When Death is so near it hustles hence
All passioned sense
Between woman and man as such!

"My husband is absent. As heretofore
The City detains him. But, in truth,
He has not been kind. . . . I will speak no blame,
But—the child is lame;
O, I pray she may reach his ruth!

"Forgive past days—I can say no more—
Maybe if we'd wedded you'd now repine! . . .
But I treated you ill. I was punished. Farewell!
—Truth shall I tell?
Would the child were yours and mine!

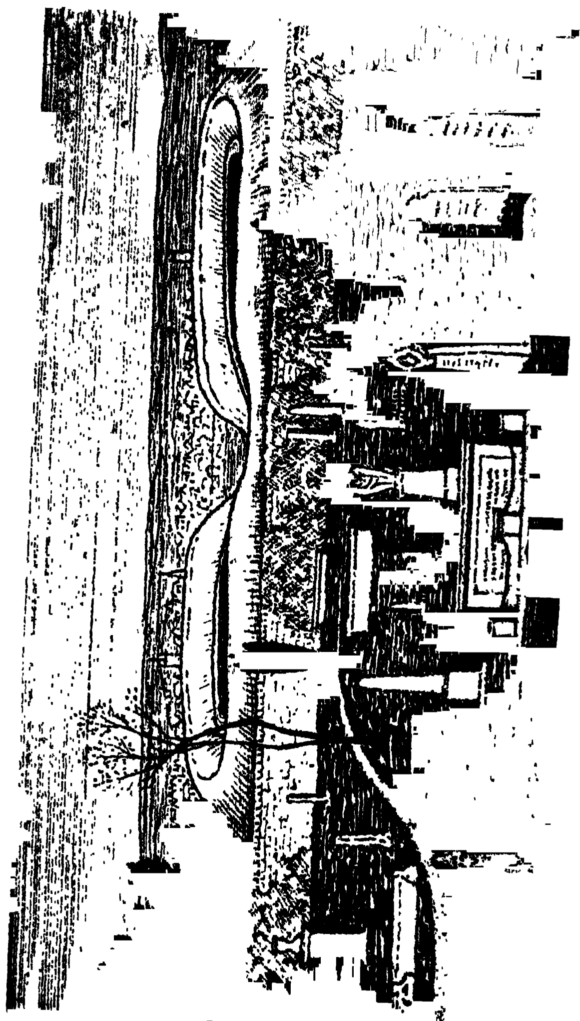
"As a wife I was true. But, such my unease
That, could I insert a deed back in Time,
I'd make her yours, to secure your care;
And the scandal bear,
And the penalty for the crime!"

—When I had left, and the swinging trees
Rang above me, as lauding her candid say,
Another was I. Her words were enough:
Came smooth, came rough.
I felt I could live my day.

Next night she died; and her obsequies
In the Field of Tombs, by the Via renowned,
Had her husband's heed. His tendance spent,
I often went
And pondered by her mound.

All that year and the next year whiled,
And I still went thitherward in the gloam;
But the Town forgot her and her nook,
And her husband took
Another Love to his home.

And the rumour flew that the lame lone child
Whom she wished for its safety child of mine,



Was treated ill when offspring came
Of the new-made dame,
And marked a more vigorous line.

A smarter grief within me wrought
Than even at loss of her so dear ;
Dead the being whose soul my soul suffused,
Her child ill-used,
I helpless to interfere !

One eve as I stood at my spot of thought
In the white-stoned Garth, brooding thus her wrong,
Her husband neared ; and to shun his view
By her hallowed mew
I went from the tombs among

To the Cirque of the Gladiators which faced—
That haggard mark of Imperial Rome,
Whose Pagan echoes mock the chime
Of our Christian time :
From its hollows of chalk and loam.

Scarce night the sun's gold touch displaced
From the vast Rotund and the neighbouring
dead
When her husband followed; bowed; half-
passed,
With lip upcast;
Then, halting, sullenly said:

"It is noised that you visit my first wife's
tomb.
Now, I gave her an honoured name to bear
While living, when dead. So I've claim to ask
By what right you task
My patience by vigiling there?

"There's decency even in death, I assume;
Preserve it, sir, and keep away;
For the mother of my first-born you
Show mind undue!
—Sir, I've nothing more to say."

A desperate stroke discerned I then—
God pardon—or pardon not—the lie;

She had sighed that she wished (lest the child
should pine
Of slights) 'twere mine,
So I said: "But the father I.

"That you thought it yours is the way of
men;
But I won her troth long ere your day:
You learnt how, in dying, she summoned me?
'Twas in fealty.
—Sir, I've nothing more to say,

"Save that, if you'll hand me my little maid,
I'll take her, and rear her, and spare you toil.
Think it more than a friendly act none can;
I'm a lonely man,
While you've a large pot to boil.

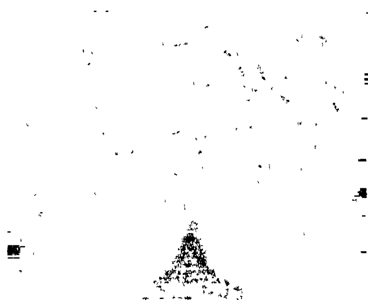
"If not, and you'll put it to ball or blade—
To-night, to-morrow night, anywhen—
I'll meet you here. . . . But think of it,
And in season fit
Let me hear from you again."

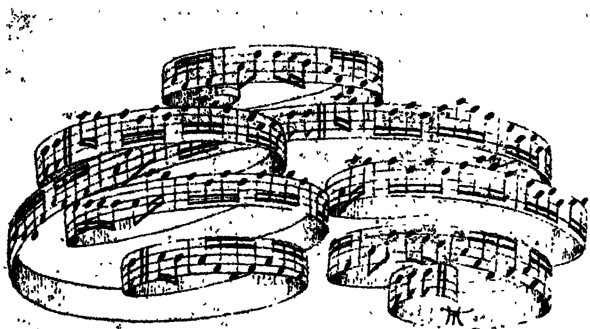
—Well, I went away, hoping; but nought I
 heard
Of my stroke for the child, till there greeted
 me
A little voice that one day came
 To my window-frame
 And babbled innocently:

"My father who's not my own, sends
 word
I'm to stay here, sir, where I belong!"
Next a writing came: "Since the child was
 the fruit
 Of your lawless suit,
 Pray take her, to right a wrong."

And I did. And I gave the child my love,
And the child loved me, and estranged us
 none.
But compunctions loomed; for I'd harmed
 the dead
 By what I'd said
 For the good of the living one.

—Yet though, God wot, I am sinner enough,
And unworthy the woman who drew me so,
Perhaps this wrong for her darling's good
        She forgives, or would,
    If only she could know!





THE DANCE AT THE PHŒNIX

TO Jenny came a gentle youth
  From inland leazes lone,
His love was fresh as apple-blooth
  By Parrett, Yeo, or Tone.
And duly he entreated her
To be his tender minister,
  And call him aye her own.

Fair Jenny's life had hardly been
  A life of modesty;
At Casterbridge experience keen
  Of many loves had she

From scarcely sixteen years above;
Among them sundry troopers of
The King's-Own Cavalry.

But each with charger, sword, and gun,
Had bluffed the Biscay wave;
And Jenny prized her gentle one
For all the love he gave.
She vowed to be, if they were wed,
His honest wife in heart and head
From bride-ale hour to grave.

Wedded they were. Her husband's trust
In Jenny knew no bound,
And Jenny kept her pure and just,
Till even malice found
No sin or sign of ill to be
In one who walked so decently
The duteous helpmate's round.

Two sons were born, and bloomed to men,
And roamed, and were as not:
Alone was Jenny left again
As ere her mind had sought

A solace in domestic joys,
And ere the vanished pair of boys
Were sent to sun her cot.

She numbered near on sixty years,
And passed as elderly,
When, in the street, with flush of fears,
One day discovered she,
From shine of swords and thump of drum.
Her early loves from war had come,
The King's-Own Cavalry.

She turned aside, and bowed her head
Anigh Saint Peter's door;
"Alas for chastened thoughts!" she said;
"I'm faded now, and hoar,
And yet those notes—they thrill me through,
And those gay forms move me anew
As in the years of yore!" . . .

'Twas Christmas, and the Phœnix Inn
Was lit with tapers tall,
For thirty of the trooper men
Had vowed to give a ball

As "Theirs" had done ('twas handed down)
When lying in the selfsame town
        Ere Buonaparté's fall.

That night the throbbing "Soldier's Joy,"
        The measured tread and sway
Of "Fancy-Lad" and "Maiden Coy,"
        Reached Jenny as she lay
Beside her spouse; till springtide blood
Seemed scouring through her like a flood
        That whisked the years away.

She rose, and rayed, and decked her head
        Where the bleached hairs ran thin;
Upon her cap two bows of red
        She fixed with hasty pin;
Unheard descending to the street,
She trod the flags with tune-led feet,
        And stood before the Inn.

Save for the dancers', not a sound
        Disturbed the icy air;
No watchman on his midnight round
        Or traveller was there;

But over All-Saints', high and bright,
Pulsed to the music Sirius white,
The Wain by Bullstake Square.

She knocked, but found her further stride
Checked by a sergeant tall:
"Gay Granny, whence come you?" he cried;
"This is a private ball."
—"No one has more right here than me!
Ere you were born, man," answered she,
"I knew the regiment all!"

"Take not the lady's visit ill!"
Upspoke the steward free;
"We lack sufficient partners still,
So, prithee let her be!"
They seized and whirled her 'mid the maze,
And Jenny felt as in the days
Of her immodesty.

Hour chased each hour, and night advanced;
She sped as shod with wings;
Each time and every time she danced—
Reels, jigs, poussettes, and flings:

They cheered her as she soared and
swooped,
(She'd learnt ere art in dancing drooped
From hops to slothful swings).

The favourite Quick-step "Speed the
Plough"—
(Cross hands, cast off, and wheel)—
"The Triumph," "Sylph," "The Row-
dow-dow,"
Famed "Major Malley's Reel,"
"The Duke of York's," "The Fairy Dance,"
"The Bridge of Lodi" (brought from
France),
She beat out, toe and heel.

The "Fall of Paris" clanged its close,
And Peter's chime told four,
When Jenny, bosom-beating, rose
To seek her silent door.
They tiptoed in escorting her,
Lest stroke of heel or clink of spur
Should break her goodman's snore.

The fire that late had burnt fell slack
    When lone at last stood she;
Her nine-and-fifty years came back;
    She sank upon her knee
Beside the durn, and like a dart
A something arrowed through her heart
    In shoots of agony.

Their footsteps died as she leant there,
    Lit by the morning star
Hanging above the moorland, where
    The aged elm-rows are;
And, as o'ernight, from Pummery Ridge
To Maembury Ring and Standfast Bridge
    No life stirred, near or far.

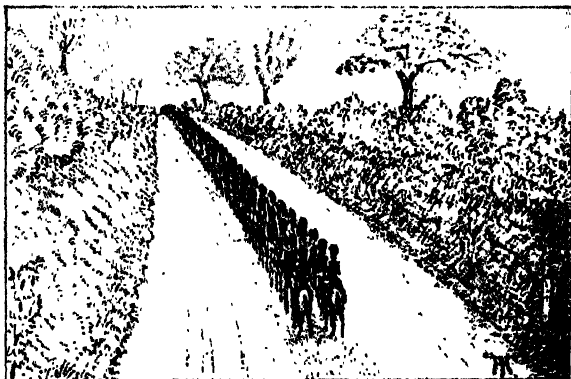
Though inner mischief worked amain,
    She reached her husband's side;
Where, toil-weary, as he had lain
    Beneath the patchwork pied
When yestereve she'd forthward crept,
And as unwitting, still he slept
    Who did in her confide.

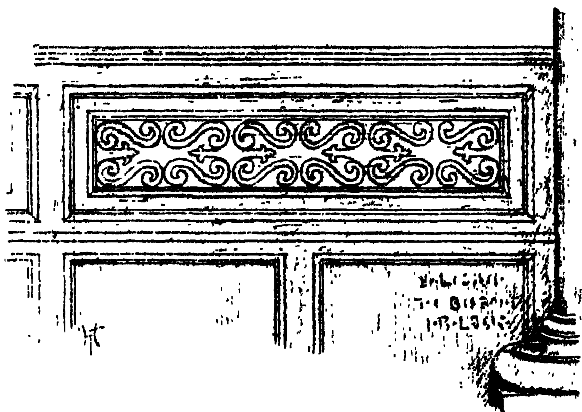
A tear sprang as she turned and viewed
His features free from guile ;
She kissed him long, as when, just wooed,
She chose his domicile.
She felt she could have given her life
To be the single-hearted wife
That she had been erstwhile.

Time wore to six. Her husband rose
And struck the steel and stone ;
He glanced at Jenny, whose repose
Seemed deeper than his own.
With dumb dismay, on closer sight,
He gathered sense that in the night,
Or morn, her soul had flown.

When told that some too mighty strain
For one so many-yeared
Had burst her bosom's master-vein,
His doubts remained unstirred.
His Jenny had not left his side
Betwixt the eve and morning-tide :
—The King's said not a word.

Well! times are not as times were then,
    Nor fair ones half so free;
And truly they were martial men,
    The King's-Own Cavalry.
And when they went from Casterbridge
And vanished over Mellstock Ridge,
    'Twas saddest morn to see.





THE CASTERBRIDGE CAPTAINS

(KHYBER PASS, 1842)

A TRADITION OF J. B. L——, T. G B——, AND J. L——

THREE captains went to Indian wars,
And only one returned:
Their mate of yore, he singly wore
The laurels all had earned.

A SIGN-SEEKER

I MARK the months in liveries dank and dry,
The noontides many-shaped and hued;
I see the nightfall shades subtrude,
And hear the monotonous hours clang negligently by.

I view the evening bonfires of the sun
On hills where morning rains have hissed;
The eyeless countenance of the mist
Pallidly rising when the summer droughts are done.

I have seen the lightning-blade, the leaping
star,
The cauldrons of the sea in storm,
Have felt the earthquake's lifting arm,
And trodden where abysmal fires and snow-
cones are.

I learn to prophesy the hid eclipse,
The coming of eccentric orbs;
To mete the dust the sky absorbs,
To weigh the sun, and fix the hour each
planet dips.

I witness fellow earth-men surge and strive;
Assemblies meet, and throb, and part;
Death's soothing finger, sorrow's smart;
—All the vast various moils that mean a
world alive.

But that I fain would wot of shuns my sense—
Those sights of which old prophets tell,
Those signs the general word so well,
Vouchsafed to their unheed, denied my
long suspense.

In graveyard green, behind his monument
To glimpse a phantom parent, friend,
Wearing his smile, and "Not the end!"
Outbreathing softly: that were blest enlightenment;

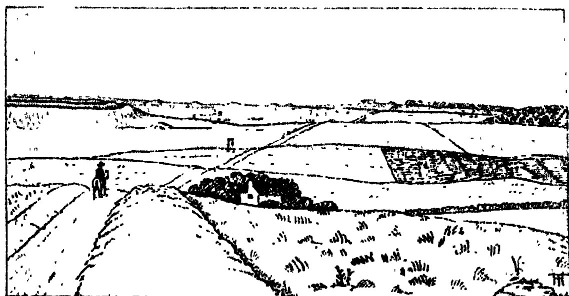
Or, if a dead Love's lips, whom dreams reveal
When midnight imps of King Decay
Delve sly to solve me back to clay,
Should leave some print to prove her spirit-kisses real;

Or, when Earth's Frail lie bleeding of her Strong,
If some Recorder, as in Writ,
Near to the weary scene should flit
And drop one plume as pledge that Heaven inscrolls the wrong.

—There are who, rapt to heights of trancéd trust,
These tokens claim to feel and see,
Read radiant hints of times to be—
Of heart to heart returning after dust to dust.

Such scope is granted not to lives like
mine . . .
I have lain in dead men's beds, have
walked
The tombs of those with whom I'd talked,
Called many a gone and goodly one to shape
a sign,

And panted for response. But none replies ;
No warnings loom, nor whisperings
To open out my limitings,
And Nescience mutely muses : When a man
falls he lies.



MY CICELY

(17—)

"ALIVE?"—And I leapt in my wonder,
Was faint of my joyance,
And grasses and grove shone in garments
Of glory to me.

"She lives, in a plenteous well-being,
To-day as aforehand;
The dead bore the name—though a rare
one—
The name that bore she."

She lived . . . I, afar in the city
  Of frenzy-led factions,
Had squandered green years and maturer
  In bowing the knee

To Baals illusive and specious,
  Till chance had there voiced me
That one I loved vainly in nonage
  Had ceased her to be.

The passion the planets had scowled on,
  And change had let dwindle,
Her death-rumour smartly relifted
  To full apogee.

I mounted a steed in the dawning
  With acheful remembrance,
And made for the ancient West Highway
  To far Exonb'ry.

Passing heaths, and the House of Long
    Sieging,
  I neared the thin steeple

That tops the fair fane of Poore's olden
  Episcopal see ;

And, changing anew my onbearer,
  I traversed the downland
Whereon the bleak hill-graves of Chieftains
  Bulge barren of tree ;

And still sadly onward I followed
  That Highway the Icen,
Which trails its pale riband down Wessex
  O'er lynchet and lea.

Along through the Stour-bordered Forum,
  Where Legions had wayfared,
And where the slow river upglasses
  Its green canopy,

And by Weatherbury Castle, and thencefrom
  Through Casterbridge held I
Still on, to entomb her my vision
  Saw stretched pallidly.

No highwayman's trot blew the night-wind
  To me so life-weary,
But only the creak of the gibbets
  Or waggoners' jee.

Triple-ramparted Maidon gloomed grayly
  Above me from southward,
And north the hill-fortress of Eggar,
  And square Pummerie.

The Nine-Pillared Cromlech, the Bride-streams,
  The Axe, and the Otter
I passed, to the gate of the city
  Where Exe scents the sea ;

Till, spent, in the graveacre pausing,
  I learnt 'twas not my Love
To whom Mother Church had just murmured
  A last lullaby.

—"Then, where dwells the Canon's kins-
    woman,
  My friend of aforetime?"—

('Twas hard to repress my heart-heavings
And new ecstasy.)

"She wedded."—"Ah!"—"Wedded beneath
her—
She keeps the stage-hostel
Ten miles hence, beside the great Highway—
The famed Lions-Three.

"Her spouse was her lackey—no option
'Twixt wedlock and worse things;
A lapse over-sad for a lady
Of her pedigree!"

I shuddered, said nothing, and wandered
To shades of green laurel:
Too ghastly had grown those first tidings
So brightsome of blee!

For, on my ride hither, I'd halted
Awhile at the Lions,
And her—her whose name had once opened
My heart as a key—

I'd looked on, unknowing, and witnessed
  Her jests with the tapsters,
Her liquor-fired face, her thick accents
  In naming her fee.

"O God, why this seeming derision!"
  I cried in my anguish:
"O once Loved, O fair Unforgotten—
  That Thing—meant it thee!

"Inurned and at peace, lost but sainted,
  Were grief I could compass;
Depraved—'tis for Christ's poor dependent
  A cruel decree!"

I backed on the Highway; but passed not
  The hostel. Within there
Too mocking to Love's re-expression
  Was Time's repartee!

Uptracking where Legions had wayfared,
  By cromlechs unstoried,
And lynchets, and sepultured Chieftains,
  In self-colloquy,

A feeling stirred in me and strengthened
  That *she* was not my Love,
But she of the garth, who lay rapt in
  Her long reverie.

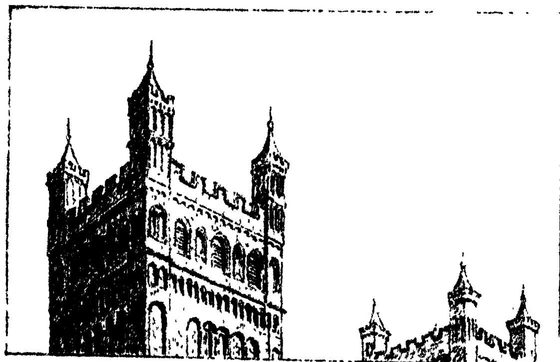
And thence till to-day I persuade me
  That this was the true one;
That Death stole intact her young dearness
  And innocency.

Frail-witted, illuded they call me;
  I may be. 'Tis better
To dream than to own the debasement
  Of sweet Cicely.

Moreover I rate it unseemly
  To hold that kind Heaven
Could work such device—to her ruin
  And my misery.

So, lest I disturb my choice vision,
  I shun the West Highway,
Even now, when the knaps ring with rhythms
  From blackbird and bee;

And feel that with slumber half-conscious
  She rests in the church-hay,
Her spirit unsoiled as in youth-time
  When lovers were we.





HER IMMORTALITY

UPON a noon I pilgrimed through
A pasture, mile by mile,
Unto the place where I last saw
My dead Love's living smile.

And sorrowing I lay me down
Upon the heated sod :
It seemed as if my body pressed
The very ground she trod.

I lay, and thought; and in a trance
She came and stood me by—
The same, even to the marvellous ray
That used to light her eye.

"You draw me, and I come to you,
My faithful one," she said,
In voice that had the moving tone
It bore ere she was wed.

She said: "'Tis seven years since I died
Few now remember me;
My husband clasps another bride;
My children's love has she.

"My brethren, sisters, and my friends
Care not to meet my sprite:
Who prized me most I did not know
Till I passed down from sight."

I said: "My days are lonely here;
I need thy smile alway:
I'll use this night my ball or blade,
And join thee ere the day."

A tremor stirred her tender lips,
    Which parted to dissuade:
"That cannot be, O friend," she cried;
    "Think, I am but a Shade!

"A Shade but in its mindful ones
    Has immortality;
By living, me you keep alive,
    By dying you slay me.

"In you resides my single power
    Of sweet continuance here;
On your fidelity I count
    Through many a coming year."

—I started through me at her plight,
    So suddenly confessed:
Dismissing late distaste for life,
    I craved its bleak unrest.

"I will not die, my One of all!—
    To lengthen out thy days
I'll guard me from minutest harms
    That may invest my ways!"

She smiled and went. Since then she comes
    Oft when her birth-moon climbs,
Or at the seasons' ingresses
    Or anniversary times ;

But grows my grief. When I surcease,
    Through whom alone lives she,
Ceases my Love, her words, her ways,
    Never again to be !

THE IVY-WIFE

I LONGED to love a full-boughed beech
And be as high as he:
I stretched an arm within his reach,
And signalled unity.
But with his drip he forced a breach,
And tried to poison me.

I gave the grasp of partnership
To one of other race—

A plane: he barked him strip by strip
From upper bough to base;
And me therewith; for gone my grip,
My arms could not enlace.

In new affection next I strove
To coll an ash I saw,
And he in trust received my love;
Till with my soft green claw
I cramped and bound him as I wove . . .
Such was my love: ha-ha!

By this I gained his strength and height
Without his rivalry.
But in my triumph I lost sight
Of afterhaps. Soon he,
Being bark-bound, flagged, snapped, fell outright,
And in his fall felled me!

A MEETING WITH DESPAIR

AS evening shaped I found me on a moor
Which sight could scarce sustain:
The black lean land, of featureless contour,
Was like a tract in pain.

"This scene, like my own life," I said, "is one
Where many glooms abide;
Toned by its fortune to a deadly dun—
Lightless on every side.

I glanced aloft and halted, pleasure-caught
To see the contrast there:
The ray-lit clouds gleamed glory; and I thought,
"There's solace everywhere!"

Then bitter self-reproaches as I stood
I dealt me silently
As one perverse—misrepresenting Good
In graceless mutiny.

Against the horizon's dim-discernèd wheel
A form rose, strange of mould:
That he was hideous, hopeless, I could feel
Rather than could behold.

"'Tis a dead spot, where even the light lies spent
To darkness!" croaked the Thing.
"Not if you look aloft!" said I, intent
On my new reasoning.

"Yea—but await awhile!" he cried. "Ho-ho!—
Look now aloft and see!"
I looked. There, too, sat night: Heaven's radiant show
Had gone. Then chuckled he.

UNKNOWING

WHEN, soul in soul reflected,
We breathed an æthered air,
When we neglected
All things elsewhere,
And left the friendly friendless
To keep our love aglow,
We deemed it endless . . .
—We did not know!

When panting passion-goaded,
We planned to hie away,

But, unforeboded,
All the long day
The storm so pierced and pattered
That none could up and go,
Our lives seemed shattered . . .
—We did not know!

When I found you, helpless lying,
And you waived my deep misprise,
And swore me, dying,
In phantom-guise
To wing to me when grieving,
And touch away my woe,
We kissed, believing . . .
—We did not know!

But though, your powers outreckoning,
You hold you dead and dumb,
Or scorn my beckoning,
And will not come;
And I say, "Why thus inanely
Brood on her memory so!"
I say it vainly—
I feel and know!

FRIENDS BEYOND

WILLIAM DEWY, Tranter Reuben,
Farmer Ledlow late at plough,
Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's,
And the Squire, and Lady Susan, lie in Mell-
stock churchyard now!

"Gone," I call them, gone for good, that
group of local hearts and heads;
Yet at mothy curfew-tide,
And at midnight when the noon-heat breathes
it back from walls and leads,

They've a way of whispering to me—
fellow-wight who yet abide—
In the muted, measured note
Of a ripple under archways, or a lone
cave's stillicide:

"We have triumphed: this achievement
turns the bane to antidote,
Unsuccesses to success,
Many thought-worn eves and morrows
to a morrow free of thought.

"No more need we corn and clothing,
feel of old terrestrial stress;
Chill detraction stirs no sigh;
Fear of death has even bygone us: death
gave all that we possess."

W. D.—"Ye mid burn the wold bass-viol that
I set such vallie by."
Squire.—"You may hold the manse in fee,
You may wed my spouse, my children's
memory of me may decry."

Lady.—" You may have my rich brocades, my laces ; take each household key ;
Ransack coffer, desk, bureau ;
Quiz the few poor treasures hid there, con the letters kept by me."

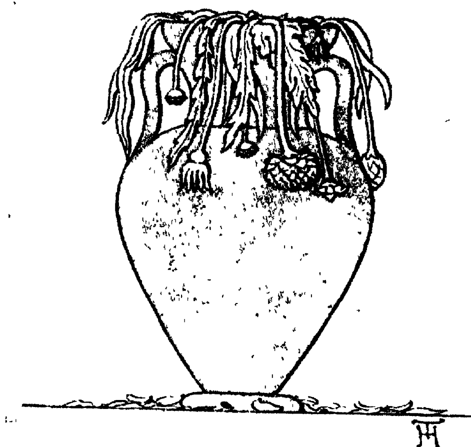
Far.—" Ye mid zell my favourite heifer, ye mid let the charlock grow,
Foul the grinterns, give up thrift."
Wife.—" If ye break my best blue china, children, I shan't care or ho."

All.—" We've no wish to hear the tidings, how the people's fortunes shift ;
What your daily doings are ;
Who are wedded, born, divided ; if your lives beat slow or swift.

" Curious not the least are we if our intents you make or mar,
If you quire to our old tune,
If the City stage still passes, if the weirs still roar afar."

—Thus, with very gods' composure, freed
those crosses late and soon
Which, in life, the Trine allow
(Why, none witteth), and ignoring all
that haps beneath the moon,

William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer
Ledlow late at plough,
Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's,
And the Squire, and Lady Susan, mur-
mur mildly to me now.



TO OUTER NATURE

SHOW thee as I thought thee
When I early sought thee,
Omen-scouting,
All undoubting
Love alone had wrought thee—

Wrought thee for my pleasure,
Planned thee as a measure
For expounding
And resounding
Glad things that men treasure.

O for but a moment
Of that old endowment—
Light to gaily
See thy daily
Irisèd embowment!

But such re-adorning
Time forbids with scorning—
Makes me see things
Cease to be things
They were in my morning.

Fad'st thou, glow-forsaken,
Darkness-overtaken!
Thy first sweetness,
Radiance, meetness,
None shall re-awaken.

Why not sempiternal
Thou and I? Our vernal
  Brightness keeping,
  Time outleaping;
Passed the hodiernal!

THOUGHTS OF PHENA

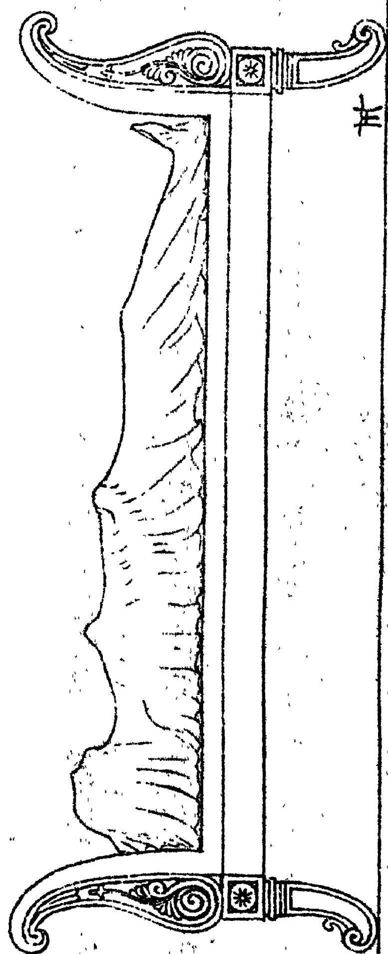
AT NEWS OF HER DEATH

NOT a line of her writing have I,
Not a thread of her hair,
No mark of her late time as dame in her dwelling, whereby
I may picture her there ;
And in vain do I urge my unsight
To conceive my lost prize
At her close, whom I knew when her dreams were upbrimming with light,
And with laughter her eyes.

What scenes spread around her last days,
Sad, shining, or dim?
Did her gifts and compassions enray and enarch her sweet ways
With an aureate nimb?
Or did life-light decline from her years,
And mischances control
Her full day-star; unease, or regret, or forebodings, or fears
Disennoble her soul?

Thus I do but the phantom retain
Of the maiden of yore
As my relic; yet haply the best of her—fined in my brain
It may be the more
That no line of her writing have I,
Nor a thread of her hair,
No mark of her late time as dame in her dwelling, whereby
I may picture her there.

March 1890.



MIDDLE-AGE ENTHUSIASMS

To M. H.

WE passed where flag and flower
Signalled a jocund throng;
We said: "Go to, the hour
Is apt!"—and joined the song;
And, kindling, laughed at life and care,
Although we knew no laugh lay there.

We walked where shy birds stood
Watching us, wonder-dumb;

Their friendship met our mood;
We cried: "We'll often come:
We'll come morn, noon, eve, everywhen!"
—We doubted we should come again.

We joyed to see strange sheens
Leap from quaint leaves in shade;
A secret light of greens
They'd for their pleasure made.
We said: "We'll set such sorts as these!"
—We knew with night the wish would cease.

"So sweet the place," we said,
"Its tacit tales so dear,
Our thoughts, when breath has sped,
Will meet and mingle here!" . . .
"Words!" mused we. "Passed the mortal door,
Our thoughts will reach this nook no more."

IN A WOOD

See "THE WOODLANDERS"

PALE beech and pine-tree blue,
Set in one clay,
Bough to bough cannot you
Bide out your day?
When the rains skim and skip,
Why mar sweet comradeship,
Blighting with poison-drip
Neighbourly spray?

Heart-halt and spirit-lame,
City-opprest,

Unto this wood I came
As to a nest;
Dreaming that sylvan peace
Offered the harrowed ease—
Nature a soft release
From men's unrest.

But, having entered in,
Great growths and small
Show them to men akin—
Combatants all!
Sycamore shoulders oak,
Bines the slim sapling yoke,
Ivy-spun halters choke
Elms stout and tall.

Touches from ash, O wych,
Sting you like scorn!
You, too, brave hollies, twitch
Sidelong from thorn.
Even the rank poplars bear
Lothly a rival's air,
Cankering in black despair
If overborne.

Since, then, no grace I find
    Taught me of trees,
Turn I back to my kind,
    Worthy as these.
There at least smiles abound,
There discourse trills around,
There, now and then, are found
    Life-loyalties.

1887: 1896.

TO A LADY

OFFENDED BY A BOOK OF THE WRITER'S

NOW that my page upcloses, doomed, maybe,
Never to press thy cosy cushions more,
Or wake thy ready Yeas as heretofore,
Or stir thy gentle vows of faith in me:

Knowing thy natural receptivity,
I figure that, as flambeaux banish eve,
My sombre image, warped by insidious heave
Of those less forthright, must lose place in thee.

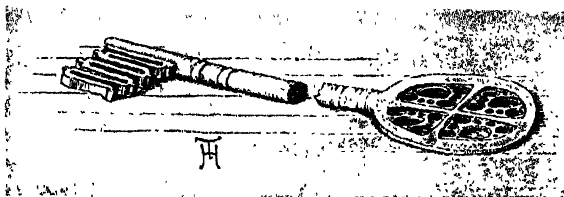
So be it. I have borne such. Let thy dreams
Of me and mine diminish day by day,
And yield their space to shine of smugger
things;
Till I shape to thee but in fitful gleams,
And then in far and feeble visitings,
And then surcease. Truth will be truth
alway.

TO AN ORPHAN CHILD

A WHIMSEY

AH, child, thou art but half thy darling mother's;
Hers couldst thou wholly be,
My light in thee would outglow all in others;
She would relive to me.
But niggard Nature's trick of birth
Bars, lest she overjoy,
Renewal of the loved on earth
Save with alloy.

The Dame has no regard, alas, my maiden,
    For love and loss like mine—
No sympathy with mind-sight memory-laden;
    Only with fickle eyne.
To her mechanic artistry
    My dreams are all unknown,
And why I wish that thou couldst be
        But One's alone!



NATURE'S QUESTIONING

WHEN I look forth at dawning, pool,
Field, flock, and lonely tree,
All seem to gaze at me
Like chastened children sitting silent in a school;

Their faces dulled, constrained, and worn,
As though the master's ways
Through the long teaching days
Their first terrestrial zest had chilled and overborne.

And on them stirs, in lippings mere
(As if once clear in call,
But now scarce breathed at all)—
"We wonder, ever wonder, why we find us here!

"Has some Vast Imbecility,
Mighty to build and blend,
But impotent to tend,
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?

"Or come we of an Automaton
Unconscious of our pains? . . .
Or are we live remains
Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?

"Or is it that some high Plan betides,
As yet not understood,
Of Evil stormed by Good,
We the Forlorn Hope over which Achievement strides?"

Thus things around. No answerer I. . . .
Meanwhile the winds, and rains,
And Earth's old glooms and pains
Are still the same, and Life and Death are neighbours nigh.

THE IMPERCIPIENT

(AT A CATHEDRAL SERVICE)

THAT from this bright believing band
An outcast I should be,
That faiths by which my comrades stand
Seem fantasies to me,
And mirage-mists their Shining Land,
Is a drear destiny.

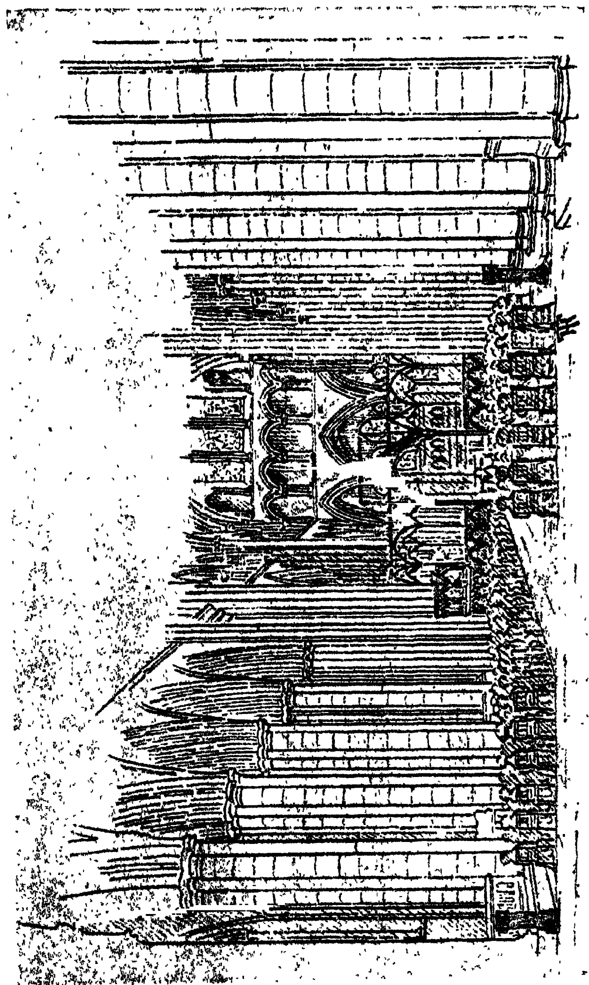
Why thus my soul should be consigned
To infelicity,

Why always I must feel as blind
To sights my brethren see,
Why joys they've found I cannot find,
Abides a mystery.

Since heart of mine knows not that ease
Which they know ; since it be
That He who breathes All's Well to these
Breathes no All's-Well to me,
My lack might move their sympathies
And Christian charity !

I am like a gazer who should mark
An inland company
Standing upfingered, with, "Hark! hark!
The glorious distant sea!"
And feel, "Alas, 'tis but yon dark
And wind-swept pine to me!"

Yet I would bear my shortcomings
With meet tranquillity,
But for the charge that blessed things
I'd liefer have unbe.



O, doth a bird deprived of wings
Go earth-bound wilfully!

. . . . .

Enough. As yet disquiet clings
About us. Rest shall we.

AT AN INN

WHEN we as strangers sought
Their catering care,
Veiled smiles bespoke their thought
Of what we were.
They warmed as they opined
Us more than friends—
That we had all resigned
For love's dear ends.

And that swift sympathy
With living love

Which quicks the world—maybe
    The spheres above,
Made them our ministers,
    Moved them to say,
"Ah, God, that bliss like theirs
    Would flush our day!"

And we were left alone
    As Love's own pair;
Yet never the love-light shone
    Between us there!
But that which chilled the breath
    Of afternoon,
And palsied unto death
    The pane-fly's tune.

The kiss their zeal foretold,
    And now deemed come,
Came not: within his hold
    Love lingered numb.
Why cast he on our port
    A bloom not ours?
Why shaped us for his sport
    In after-hours?

As we seemed we were not
    That day afar,
And now we seem not what
    We aching are.
O severing sea and land,
    O laws of men,
Ere death, once let us stand
    As we stood then!

THE SLOW NATURE

(AN INCIDENT OF FROOM VALLEY)

"THY husband—poor, poor Heart!—is
dead—
Dead, out by Moreford Rise;
A bull escaped the barton-shed,
Gored him, and there he lies!"

—"Ha, ha—go away! 'Tis a tale, methink,
Thou joker Kit!" laughed she.
"I've known thee many a year, Kit Twink,
And ever hast thou fooled me!"

—"But, Mistress Damon—I can swear
Thy goodman John is dead!
And soon th'lt hear their feet who bear
His body to his bed."

So unwontedly sad was the merry man's face—
That face which had long deceived—
That she gazed and gazed; and then could trace
The truth there; and she believed.

She laid a hand on the dresser-ledge,
And scanned far Egdon-side;
And stood; and you heard the wind-swept sedge
And the rippling Froom; till she cried:

"O my chamber's untidied, unmade my bed,
Though the day has begun to wear!
'What a slovenly hussif!' it will be said,
When they all go up my stair!"

She disappeared ; and the joker stood
Depressed by his neighbour's doom,
And amazed that a wife struck to widowhood
Thought first of her unkempt room.

But a fortnight thence she could take no food,
And she pined in a slow decay ;
While Kit soon lost his mournful mood
And laughed in his ancient way.

1894.

IN A EWELEAZE NEAR WEATHERBURY

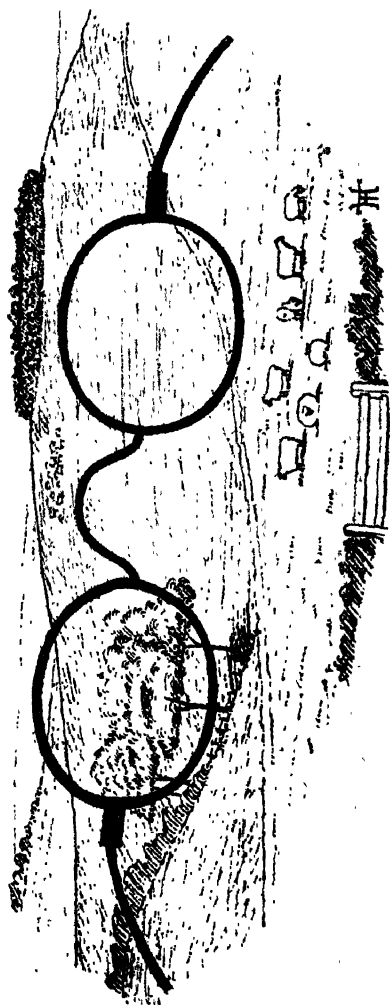
THE years have gathered grayly
  Since I danced upon this leaze
With one who kindled gaily
  Love's fitful ecstasies!
But despite the term as teacher,
  I remain what I was then
In each essential feature
  Of the fantasies of men.

Yet I note the little chisel
  Of never-napping Time,

Defacing ghast and grizzel
  The blazon of my prime.
When at night he thinks me sleeping,
  I feel him boring sly
Within my bones, and heaping
  Quaintest pains for by-and-by.

Still, I'd go the world with Beauty,
  I would laugh with her and sing,
I would shun divinest duty
  To resume her worshipping.
But she'd scorn my brave endeavour,
  She would not balm the breeze
By murmuring "Thine for ever!"
  As she did upon this leaze.

1890.



ADDITIONS

THE FIRE AT TRANTER SWEATLEY'S

THEY had long met o' Zundays—her
true love and she—
And at junketings, maypoles, and flings;
But she bode wi' a thirtover uncle, and he
Swore by noon and by night that her good-
man should be
Naibour Sweatley—a gaffer oft weak at the
knee
From taking o' sommat more cheerful than
tea—
Who tranted, and moved people's things.

She cried, "O pray pity me!" Nought
would he hear;
Then with wild rainy eyes she obeyed.
She chid when her Love was for clinking off
wi' her.
The pa'son was told, as the season drew near
To throw over pu'pit the names of the peäir
As fitting one flesh to be made.

The wedding-day dawned and the morning
drew on;
The couple stood bridegroom and bride;
The evening was passed, and when midnight
had gone
The folks horned out, "God save the King,"
and anon
The two home-along gloomily hied.

The lover Tim Tankens mourned heart-sick
and drear
To be thus of his darling deprived:
He roamed in the dark ath'art field, mound,
and mere,

And, a'most without knowing it, found himself near
The house of the tranter, and now of his Dear,
Where the lantern-light showed 'em arrived.

The bride sought her cham'er so calm and so pale
That a Northern had thought her resigned;
But to eyes that had seen her in tide-times of weal,
Like the white cloud o' smoke, the red battle-field's vail,
That look spak' of havoc behind.

The bridegroom yet laitered a beaker to drain,
Then reeled to the linhay for more,
When the candle-snoff kindled some chaff from his grain—
Flames spread, and red vlankers, wi' might and wi' main,
And round beams, thatch, and chimley-tun roar.

Young Tim away yond, rafted up by the light,
Through brimble and underwood tears,
Till he comes to the orchet, when crooping thereright
In the lewth of a codlin-tree, bivering wi' fright,
Wi' on'y her night-rail to screen her from sight,
His lonesome young Barbree appears.

Her cwold little figure half-naked he views
Played about by the frolicsome breeze,
Her light-tripping totties, her ten little tooes,
All bare and besprinkled wi' Fall's chilly dews,
While her great gallied eyes, through her hair hanging loose,
Sheened as stars through a tardle o' trees.

She eyed en ; and, as when a weir-hatch is drawn,
Her tears, penned by terror afore,

With a rushing of sobs in a shower were
strawn,
Till her power to pour 'em seemed wasted
and gone
From the heft o' misfortune she bore.

"O Tim, my *own* Tim I must call 'ee—I
will!
All the world ha' turned round on me so!
Can you help her who loved 'ee, though acting
so ill?
Can you pity her misery—feel for her still?
When worse than her body so quivering and
chill
Is her heart in its winter o' woe!

"I think I mid almost ha' borne it," she said,
"Had my griefs one by one come to
hand;
But O, to be slave to thik husbird for bread,
And then, upon top o' that, driven to wed,
And then, upon top o' that, burnt out o' bed,
Is more than my nater can stand!"

Tim's soul like a lion 'ithin en outsprung—
(Tim had a great soul when his feelings were wrung)—
"Feel for 'ee, dear Barbree?" he cried;
And his warm working-jacket about her he flung,
Made a back, horsed her up, till behind him she clung
Like a chiel on a gipsy, her figure uphung
By the sleeves that around her he tied.

Over piggeries, and mixens, and apples, and hay,
They lumpered straight into the night;
And finding bylong where a halter-path lay,
At dawn reached Tim's house, on'y seen on their way
By a naibour or two who were up wi' the day;
But they gathered no clue to the sight.

Then tender Tim Tankens he searched here and there
For some garment to clothe her fair skin;

But though he had breeches and waistcoats
to spare,
He had nothing quite seemly for Barbree to
wear,
Who, half shrammed to death, stood and cried
on a chair
At the caddle she found herself in.

There was one thing to do, and that one thing
he did,
He lent her some clouts of his own,
And she took 'em perforce; and while in 'em
she slid,
Tim turned to the winder, as modesty bid,
Thinking, "O that the picter my duty keeps
hid
To the sight o' my eyes mid be shown!"

In the tallet he stowed her; there huddied
she lay,
Shortening sleeves, legs, and tails to her
limbs;
But most o' the time in a mortal bad way,

Well knowing that there'd be the divel to pay
If 'twere found that, instead o' the elements'
prey,
She was living in lodgings at Tim's.

"Where's the tranter?" said men and boys;
"where can er be?"
"Where's the tranter?" said Barbree alone.
"Where on e'th is the tranter?" said every-
bod-y:
They sifted the dust of his perished roof-tree,
And all they could find was a bone.

Then the uncle cried, "Lord, pray have
mercy on me!"
And in terror began to repent.
But before 'twas complete, and till sure she
was free,
Barbree drew up her loft-ladder, tight turned
her key—
Tim bringing up breakfast and dinner and
tea—
Till the news of her hiding got vent.

Then followed the custom-kept rout, shout,
and flare
Of a skimmington-ride through the naibour-
hood, ere
Folk had proof o' wold Sweatley's decay
Whereupon decent people all stood in a stare,
Saying Tim and his lodger should risk it, and
pair :
So he took her to church. An' some laugh-
ing lads there
Cried to Tim, "After Sweatley!" She said
"I declare
I stand as a maiden to-day!"

Written 1866; *printed* 1875

HEIRESS AND ARCHITECT

For A. W. BLOMFIELD

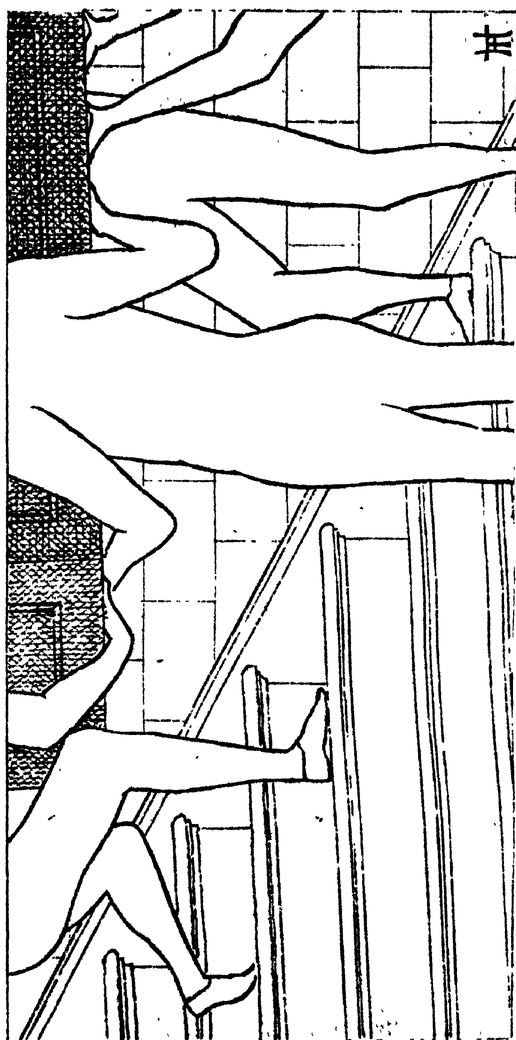
SHE sought the Studios, beckoning to her
    side
An arch-designer, for she planned to build.
He was of wise contrivance, deeply skilled
In every intervolve of high and wide—
    Well fit to be her guide.

        "Whatever it be,"
        Responded he,
With cold, clear voice, and cold, clear view,

"In true accord with prudent fashionings
For such vicissitudes as living brings,
And thwarting not the law of stable things,
That will I do."

"Shape me," she said, "high halls with tracery
And open ogive-work, that scent and hue
Of buds, and travelling bees, may come in through,
The note of birds, and singings of the sea,
For these are much to me."

"An idle whim!"
Broke forth from him
Whom nought could warm to gallantries:
"Cede all these buds and birds, the zephyr's call,
And scents, and hues, and things that falter all,
And choose as best the close and surly wall,
For winters freeze."



"Then frame," she cried, "wide fronts of
crystal glass,
That I may show my laughter and my light—
Light like the sun's by day, the stars' by
night—
Till rival heart-queens, envying, wail, 'Alas,
Her glory!' as they pass."

"O maid misled!"
He sternly said,
Whose facile foresight pierced her dire;
"Where shall abide the soul when, sick of glee,
It shrinks, and hides, and prays no eye may
see?
Those house them best who house for secrecy,
For you will tire."

"A little chamber, then, with swan and dove
Ranged thickly, and engrailed with rare device
Of reds and purples, for a Paradise
Wherein my Love may greet me, I my Love,
When he shall know thereof?"

"This, too, is ill,"
He answered still,
The man who swayed her like a shade.
"An hour will come when sight of such sweet nook
Would bring a bitterness too sharp to brook,
When brighter eyes have won away his look;
For you will fade."

Then said she faintly: "O, contrive some way—
Some narrow winding turret, quite mine own,
To reach a loft where I may grieve alone!
It is a slight thing; hence do not, I pray,
This last dear fancy slay!"

"Such winding ways
Fit not your days,"
Said he, the man of measuring eye;
"I must even fashion as my rule declares,
To wit: Give space (since life ends unawares)
To hale a coffined corpse adown the stairs;
For you will die."

1867. 8 Adelphi Terrace.

THE TWO MEN

THERE were two youths of equal age,
Wit, station, strength, and parentage;
They studied at the selfsame schools,
And shaped their thoughts by common rules.

One pondered on the life of man,
His hopes, his ending, and began
To rate the Market's sordid war
As something scarce worth living for.

"I'll brace to higher aims," said he,
"I'll further Truth and Purity;
Thereby to mend the mortal lot
And sweeten sorrow. Thrive I not,

"Winning their hearts, my kind will give
Enough that I may lowly live,
And house my Love in some dim dell,
For pleasing them and theirs so well."

Idly attired, with features wan,
In secret swift he laboured on:
Such press of power had brought much gold
Applied to things of meaner mould.

Sometimes he wished his aims had been
To gather gains like other men;
Then thanked his God he'd traced his track
Too far for wish to drag him back.

He lookèd from his loft one day
To where his slighted garden lay;
Nettles and hemlock hid each lawn,
And every flower was starved and gone.

He fainted in his heart, whereon
He rose, and sought his plighted one,
Resolved to loose her bond withal,
Lest she should perish in his fall.

He met her with a careless air,
As though he'd ceased to find her fair,
And said: "True love is dust to me;
I cannot kiss: I tire of thee!"

(That she might scorn him was he fain,
To put her sooner out of pain;
For incensed love breathes quick and dies,
When famished love a-lingering lies.)

Once done, his soul was so betossed,
It found no more the force it lost:
Hope was his only drink and food,
And hope extinct, decay ensued.

And, living long so closely penned,
He had not kept a single friend;
He dwindled thin as phantoms be,
And drooped to death in poverty. . .

Meantime his schoolmate had gone out
To join the fortune-finding rout;
He liked the winnings of the mart,
But wearied of the working part.

He turned to seek a privy lair,
Neglecting note of garb and hair,
And day by day reclined and thought
How he might live by doing nought.

"I plan a valued scheme," he said
To some. "But lend me of your bread,
And when the vast result looms nigh,
In profit you shall stand as I."

Yet they took counsel to restrain
Their kindness till they saw the gain;
And, since his substance now had run,
He rose to do what might be done.

He went unto his Love by night,
And said: "My Love, I faint in fight:
Deserving as thou dost a crown,
My cares shall never drag thee down."

(He had descried a maid whose line
Would hand her on much corn and wine,
And held her far in worth above
One who could only pray and love.)

But this Fair read him ; whence he failed
To do the deed so blithely hailed ;
He saw his projects wholly marred,
And gloom and want oppressed him hard ;

Till, living to so mean an end,
Whereby he'd lost his every friend,
He perished in a pauper sty,
His mate the dying pauper nigh.

And moralists, reflecting, said,
As "dust to dust" in burial read
Was echoed from each coffin-lid,
"These men were like in all they did."

1866.

LINES

Spoken by Miss ADA REHAN *at the Lyceum Theatre, July 23, 1890, at a performance on behalf of Lady Jeune's Holiday Fund for City Children*

BEFORE we part to alien thoughts and aims,
Permit the one brief word the occasion claims:
—When mumming and grave projects are allied,
Perhaps an Epilogue is justified.

Our under-purpose has, in truth, to-day
Commanded most our musings; least the play:

A purpose futile but for your good-will
Swiftly responsive to the cry of ill:
A purpose all too limited!—to aid
Frail human flowerets, sicklied by the shade,
In winning some short spell of upland breeze,
Or strengthening sunlight on the level leas.

Who has not marked, where the full cheek should be,
Incipient lines of lank flaccidity,
Lymphatic pallor where the pink should glow,
And where the throb of transport, pulses low?—
Most tragical of shapes from Pole to Line,
O wondering child, unwitting Time's design,
Why should Man add to Nature's quandary,
And worsen ill by thus immuring thee?
—That races do despite unto their own,
That Might supernal do indeed condone
Wrongs individual for the general ease,
Instance the proof in victims such as these.

Launched into thoroughfares too thronged
before,
Mothered by those whose protest is "No
more!"
Vitalized without option: who shall say
That did Life hang on choosing—Yea or
Nay—
They had not scorned it with such pen-
alty,
And nothingness implored of Destiny?

And yet behind the horizon smile serene
The down, the cornland, and the stretching
green—
Space—the child's heaven: scenes which at
least ensure
Some palliative for ill they cannot cure.

Dear friends—now moved by this poor show
of ours
To make your own long joy in buds and
bowers

For one brief while the joy of infant eyes,
Changing their urban murk to paradise—
You have our thanks!—may your reward include
More than our thanks, far more: their gratitude.

"I LOOK INTO MY GLASS"

I LOOK into my glass,
And view my wasting skin,
And say, "Would God it came to pass
My heart had shrunk as thin!"

For then, I, undistrest
By hearts grown cold to me,
Could lonely wait my endless rest
With equanimity.

But Time, to make me grieve,
Part steals, lets part abide;
And shakes this fragile frame at eve
With throbbings of noontide.

END OF WESSEX POEMS

POEMS OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

V.R. 1819–1901

A REVERIE

MOMENTS the mightiest pass uncalendared,
And when the Absolute
In backward Time outgave the deedful word
Whereby all life is stirred:
"Let one be born and throned whose mould shall constitute
The norm of every royal-reckoned attribute,"
No mortal knew or heard.

But in due days the purposed Life out-
shone—
Serene, sagacious, free ;
—Her waxing seasons bloomed with deeds
well done,
And the world's heart was won . . .
Yet may the deed of hers most bright in eyes
to be
Lie hid from ours—as in the All-One's thought
lay she—
Till ripening years have run.

SUNDAY NIGHT,
27th January 1901.

WAR POEMS

EMBARCATION

(Southampton Docks: October, 1899)

HERE, where Vespasian's legions struck
the sands,
And Cerdic with his Saxons entered in,
And Henry's army leapt afloat to win
Convincing triumphs over neighbour lands,

Vaster battalions press for further strands,
To argue in the self-same bloody mode
Which this late age of thought, and pact, and
code,
Still fails to mend.—Now deckward tramp the
bands,

Yellow as autumn leaves, alive as spring;
And as each host draws out upon the sea
Beyond which lies the tragical To-be,
None dubious of the cause, none murmuring,

Wives, sisters, parents, wave white hands and
smile,
As if they knew not that they weep the while.

DEPARTURE

(*Southampton Docks: October*, 1899)

WHILE the far farewell music thins and
fails,
And the broad bottoms rip the bearing
brine—
All smalling slowly to the gray sea line—
And each significant red smoke-shaft pales,

Keen sense of severance everywhere prevails,
Which shapes the late long tramp of mounting
men
To seeming words that ask and ask again:
"How long, O striving Teutons, Slavs, and
Gaels

Must your wroth reasonings trade on lives like
these,
That are as puppets in a playing hand?—
When shall the saner softer polities
Whereof we dream, have sway in each proud
land,
And patriotism, grown Godlike, scorn to
stand
Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and
seas?"

THE COLONEL'S SOLILOQUY

(*Southampton Docks : October*, 1899)

"THE quay recedes. Hurrah! Ahead we
go! . . .
It's true I've been accustomed now to home,
And joints get rusty, and one's limbs may
grow
More fit to rest than roam.

"But I can stand as yet fair stress and strain;
There's not a little steel beneath the rust;
My years mount somewhat, but here's to't
again!
And if I fall, I must.

"God knows that for myself I've scanty care;
Past scrimmages have proved as much to all;
In Eastern lands and South I've had my share
Both of the blade and ball.

"And where those villains ripped me in the flitch
With their old iron in my early time,
I'm apt at change of wind to feel a twitch,
Or at a change of clime.

"And what my mirror shows me in the morning
Has more of blotch and wrinkle than of bloom;
My eyes, too, heretofore all glasses scorning,
Have just a touch of rheum. . . .

"Now sounds 'The Girl I've left behind me.'—Ah,
The years, the ardours, wakened by that tune!
Time was when, with the crowd's farewell 'Hurrah!'
'Twould lift me to the moon.

"But now it's late to leave behind me one
Who if, poor soul, her man goes underground,
Will not recover as she might have done
In days when hopes abound.

"She's waving from the wharfside, palely grieving,
As down we draw. . . . Her tears make little show,
Yet now she suffers more than at my leaving
Some twenty years ago.

"I pray those left at home will care for her!
I shall come back; I have before; though when
The Girl you leave behind you is a grandmother,
Things may not be as then."

THE GOING OF THE BATTERY

WIVES' LAMENT

(*November* 2, 1899)

I

O IT was sad enough, weak enough, mad enough—
Light in their loving as soldiers can be—
First to risk choosing them, leave alone losing them
Now, in far battle, beyond the South Sea! . . .

II

—Rain came down drenchingly; but we un-
blenchingly
Trudged on beside them through mirk and
through mire,
They stepping steadily—only too readily!—
Scarce as if stepping brought parting-time
nigher.

III

Great guns were gleaming there, living things
seeming there,
Cloaked in their tar-cloths, upmouthed to the
night;
Wheels wet and yellow from axle to felloe,
Throats blank of sound, but prophetic to sight.

IV

Gas-glimmers drearily, blearily, eerily
Lit our pale faces outstretched for one kiss,
While we stood prest to them, with a last
quest to them
Not to court perils that honour could miss.

V

Sharp were those sighs of ours, blinded these
eyes of ours,
When at last moved away under the arch
All we loved. Aid for them each woman
prayed for them,
Treading back slowly the track of their march.

VI

Someone said : "Nevermore will they come :
evermore
Are they now lost to us." O it was wrong !
Though may be hard their ways, some Hand
will guard their ways,
Bear them through safely, in brief time or long.

VII

—Yet, voices haunting us, daunting us, taunt-
ing us,
Hint in the night-time when life beats are low
Other and graver things . . . Hold we to
braver things,
Wait we, in trust, what Time's fulness shall
show.

AT THE WAR OFFICE, LONDON

(*Affixing the Lists of Killed and Wounded: December*, 1899)

I

LAST year I called this world of gain-
givings
The darkest thinkable, and questioned
sadly
If my own land could heave its pulse less
gladly,
So charged it seemed with circumstance
whence springs
The tragedy of things.

II

Yet at that censured time no heart was rent
Or feature blanched of parent, wife, or daughter
By hourly blazoned sheets of listed slaughter;
Death waited Nature's wont; Peace smiled unshent
From Ind to Occident.

A CHRISTMAS GHOST-STORY

SOUTH of the Line, inland from far
  Durban,
A mouldering soldier lies—your countryman.
Awry and doubled up are his gray bones,
And on the breeze his puzzled phantom
  moans
Nightly to clear Canopus: "I would know
By whom and when the All-Earth-gladdening
  Law
Of Peace, brought in by that Man Crucified,
Was ruled to be inept, and set aside?

And what of logic or of truth appears
In tacking 'Anno Domini' to the years?
Near twenty-hundred liveried thus have hied,
But tarries yet the Cause for which He died."

Christmas-eve, 1899.

DRUMMER HODGE

I

THEY throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest
Uncoffined—just as found:
His landmark is a kopje-crest
That breaks the veldt around;
And foreign constellations west
Each night above his mound.

II

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew—
Fresh from his Wessex home—
The meaning of the broad Karoo,
The Bush, the dusty loam,
And why uprose to nightly view
Strange stars amid the gloam.

III

Yet portion of that unknown plain
Will Hodge for ever be;
His homely Northern breast and brain
Grow up a Southern tree,
And strange-eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally.

A WIFE IN LONDON

(*December*, 1899)

I

THE TRAGEDY

SHE sits in the tawny vapour
That the City lanes have uprolled,
Behind whose webby fold on fold
Like a waning taper
The street-lamp glimmers cold.

A messenger's knock cracks smartly,
Flashed news is in her hand
Of meaning it dazes to understand

Though shaped so shortly :
He—has fallen—in the far South Land. . . .

II

THE IRONY

'Tis the morrow ; the fog hangs thicker,
The postman nears and goes :
A letter is brought whose lines disclose
By the firelight flicker
His hand, whom the worm now knows :

Fresh—firm—penned in highest feather—
Page-full of his hoped return,
And of home-planned jaunts by brake and burn
In the summer weather,
And of new love that they would learn.

THE SOULS OF THE SLAIN

I

THE thick lids of Night closed upon me
Alone at the Bill
Of the Isle by the Race *—
Many-caverned, bald, wrinkled of face—
And with darkness and silence the spirit was on me
To brood and be still.

* The "Race" is the turbulent sea-area off the Bill of Portland, where contrary tides meet.

II

No wind fanned the flats of the ocean,
Or promontory sides,
Or the ooze by the strand,
Or the bent-bearded slope of the land,
Whose base took its rest amid everlong motion
Of criss-crossing tides.

III

Soon from out of the Southward seemed nearing
A whirr, as of wings
Waved by mighty-vanned flies,
Or by night-moths of measureless size,
And in softness and smoothness well-nigh beyond hearing
Of corporal things.

IV

And they bore to the bluff, and alighted—
A dim-discerned train
Of sprites without mould,
Frameless souls none might touch or might hold—

On the ledge by the turreted lantern, far-
sighted
By men of the main.

V

And I heard them say "Home!" and I
knew them
For souls of the felled
On the earth's nether bord
Under Capricorn, whither they'd warred,
And I neared in my awe, and gave heedfulness
to them
With breathings inheld.

VI

Then, it seemed, there approached from
the northward
A senior soul-flame
Of the like filmy hue:
And he met them and spake: "Is it you,
O my men?" Said they, "Aye! We bear
homeward and hearthward
To list to our fame!"

VII

"I've flown there before you," he said
then:
"Your households are well;
But—your kin linger less
On your glory and war-mightiness
Than on dearer things."—"Dearer?" cried
these from the dead then,
"Of what do they tell?"

VIII

"Some mothers muse sadly, and murmur
Your doings as boys—
Recall the quaint ways
Of your babyhood's innocent days.
Some pray that, ere dying, your faith had
grown firmer,
And higher your joys.

IX

"A father broods: 'Would I had set him
To some humble trade,
And so slacked his high fire,
And his passionate martial desire;

Had told him no stories to woo him and whet
him
To this dire crusade!"

X

"And, General, how hold out our sweet-
hearts,
Sworn loyal as doves?"
—"Many mourn; many think
It is not unattractive to prink
Them in sables for heroes. Some fickle and
fleet hearts
Have found them new loves."

XI

"And our wives?" quoth another re-
signedly,
"Dwell they on our deeds?"
—"Deeds of home; that live yet
Fresh as new—deeds of fondness or fret;
Ancient words that were kindly expressed or
unkindly,
These, these have their heeds."

XII

—"Alas! then it seems that our glory
Weighs less in their thought
Than our old homely acts,
And the long-ago commonplace facts
Of our lives—held by us as scarce part of our
story,
And rated as nought!"

XIII

Then bitterly some: "Was it wise now
To raise the tomb-door
For such knowledge? Away!"
But the rest: "Fame we prized till to-day;
Yet that hearts keep us green for old kindness
we prize now
A thousand times more!"

XIV

Thus speaking, the trooped apparitions
Began to disband
And resolve them in two:
Those whose record was lovely and true

Bore to northward for home: those of bitter
traditions
Again left the land,

XV

And, towering to seaward in legions,
They paused at a spot
Overbending the Race—
That engulphing, ghast, sinister place—
Whither headlong they plunged, to the fathom-
less regions
Of myriads forgot.

XVI

And the spirits of those who were homing
Passed on, rushingly,
Like the Pentecost Wind;
And the whirr of their wayfaring thinned
And surceased on the sky, and but left in the
gloaming
Sea-mutterings and me.

December 1899.

SONG OF THE SOLDIERS' WIVES

I

AT last! In sight of home again,
Of home again;
No more to range and roam again
As at that bygone time?
No more to go away from us
And stay from us?—
Dawn, hold not long the day from us,
But quicken it to prime!

II

Now all the town shall ring to them,
          Shall ring to them,
And we who love them cling to them
      And clasp them joyfully;
And cry, "O much we'll do for you
          Anew for you,
Dear Loves!—aye, draw and hew for you,
      Come back from oversea."

III

Some told us we should meet no more,
          Should meet no more;
Should wait, and wish, but greet no more
      Your faces round our fires;
That, in a while, uncharily
          And drearily
Men gave their lives—even wearily,
      Like those whom living tires.

IV

And now you are nearing home again,
    Dears, home again;
No more, may be, to roam again
    As at that bygone time,
Which took you far away from us
        To stay from us;
Dawn, hold not long the day from us,
    But quicken it to prime!

THE SICK BATTLE-GOD

I

IN days when men had joy of war,
A God of Battles sped each mortal jar;
The peoples pledged him heart and hand,
From Israel's land to isles afar.

II

His crimson form, with clang and chime,
Flashed on each murk and murderous meeting-time,

And kings invoked, for rape and raid,
His fearsome aid in rune and rhyme.

III

On bruise and blood-hole, scar and seam,
On blade and bolt, he flung his fulgid beam:
His haloes rayed the very gore,
And corpses wore his glory-gleam.

IV

Often an early King or Queen,
And storied hero onward, knew his sheen;
'Twas glimpsed by Wolfe, by Ney anon,
And Nelson on his blue demesne.

V

But new light spread. That god's gold nimb
And blazon have waned dimmer and more dim;
Even his flushed form begins to fade,
Till but a shade is left of him.

VI

That modern meditation broke
His spell, that penmen's pleadings dealt a stroke,
Say some; and some that crimes too dire
Did much to mire his crimson cloak.

VII

Yea, seeds of crescive sympathy
Were sown by those more excellent than he,
Long known, though long contemned till then—
The gods of men in amity.

VIII

Souls have grown seers, and thought out-brings
The mournful many-sidedness of things
With foes as friends, enfeebling ires
And fury-fires by gaingivings!

IX

He scarce impassions champions now;
They do and dare, but tensely—pale of brow;

And would they fain uplift the arm
Of that faint form they know not how.

X

Yet wars arise, though zest grows cold;
Wherefore, at whiles, as 'twere in ancient mould
He looms, bepatched with paint and lath;
But never hath he seemed the old!

XI

Let men rejoice, let men deplore,
The lurid Deity of heretofore
Succumbs to one of saner nod;
The Battle-god is god no more.

POEMS OF PILGRIMAGE

GENOA AND THE MEDI-TERRANEAN

(*March*, 1887)

O EPIC-FAMED, god-haunted Central
Sea,
Heave careless of the deep wrong done
to thee
When from Torino's track I saw thy face first
flash on me.

And multimarbled Genova the Proud,
Gleam all unconscious how, wide-lipped, up-browed,
I first beheld thee clad—not as the Beauty but the Dowd.

Out from a deep-delved way my vision lit
On housebacks pink, green, ochreous—where a slit
Shoreward 'twixt row and row revealed the classic blue through it.

And thereacross waved fishwives' high-hung smocks,
Chrome kerchiefs, scarlet hose, darned underfrocks;
Since when too oft my dreams of thee, O Queen, that frippery mocks:

Whereat I grieve, Superba! . . . Afterhours
Within Palazzo Doria's orange bowers
Went far to mend these marrings of thy soul-subliming powers.

But, Queen, such squalid undress none
should see,
Those dream-endangering eyewounds no
more be
Where lovers first behold thy form in pilgrimage to thee.

SHELLEY'S SKYLARK

(The neighbourhood of Leghorn: March, 1887)

SOMEWHERE afield here something lies
In Earth's oblivious eyeless trust
That moved a poet to prophecies—
A pinch of unseen, unguarded dust·

The dust of the lark that Shelley heard,
And made immortal through times to be;—
Though it only lived like another bird,
And knew not its immortality.

Lived its meek life ; then, one day, fell—
A little ball of feather and bone ;
And how it perished, when piped farewell,
And where it wastes, are alike unknown.

Maybe it rests in the loam I view,
Maybe it throbs in a myrtle's green,
Maybe it sleeps in the coming hue
Of a grape on the slopes of yon inland scene.

Go find it, faeries, go and find
That tiny pinch of priceless dust,
And bring a casket silver-lined,
And framed of gold that gems encrust ;

And we will lay it safe therein,
And consecrate it to endless time ;
For it inspired a bard to win
Ecstatic heights in thought and rhyme.

IN THE OLD THEATRE, FIESOLE

(*April*, 1887)

I TRACED the Circus whose gray stones
incline
Where Rome and dim Etruria interjoin,
Till came a child who showed an ancient coin
That bore the image of a Constantine.

She lightly passed; nor did she once opine
How, better than all books, she had raised
for me

In swift perspective Europe's history
Through the vast years of Cæsar's sceptred line.

For in my distant plot of English loam
'Twas but to delve, and straightway there to find
Coins of like impress. As with one half blind
Whom common simples cure, her act flashed home
In that mute moment to my opened mind
The power, the pride, the reach of perished Rome.

ROME: ON THE PALATINE

(*April*, 1887)

WE walked where Victor Jove was
shrined awhile,
And passed to Livia's rich red mural show,
Whence, thridding cave and Criptoportico,
We gained Caligula's dissolving pile.

And each ranked ruin tended to beguile
The outer sense, and shape itself as though

It wore its marble hues, its pristine glow
Of scenic frieze and pompous peristyle.

When lo, swift hands, on strings nigh over-
head,
Began to melodize a waltz by Strauss:
It stirred me as I stood, in Cæsar's house,
Raised the old routs Imperial lyres had led,

And blended pulsing life with lives long done,
Till Time seemed fiction, Past and Present
one.

ROME

BUILDING A NEW STREET IN THE ANCIENT QUARTER

(*April*, 1887)

THESE umbered cliffs and gnarls of masonry
Outskeleton Time's central city, Rome;
Whereof each arch, entablature, and dome
Lies bare in all its gaunt anatomy.

And cracking frieze and rotten metope
Express, as though they were an open tome

Top-lined with caustic monitory gnome;
"Dunces, Learn here to spell Humanity!"

And yet within these ruins' very shade
The singing workmen shape and set and join
Their frail new mansion's stuccoed cove and quoin
With no apparent sense that years abrade,
Though each rent wall their feeble works invade
Once shamed all such in power of pier and groin.

ROME

THE VATICAN—SALA DELLE MUSE

(1887)

I SAT in the Muses' Hall at the mid of the
 day,
And it seemed to grow still, and the people to
 pass away,
And the chiselled shapes to combine in a haze
 of sun,
Till beside a Carrara column there gleamed
 forth One.

She was nor this nor that of those beings
divine,
But each and the whole—an essence of all the
Nine;
With tentative foot she neared to my halting-
place,
A pensive smile on her sweet, small, marvellous
face.

"Regarded so long, we render thee sad?" said
she.
"Not you," sighed I, "but my own incon-
stancy!
I worship each and each; in the morning one,
And then, alas! another at sink of sun.

"To-day my soul clasps Form; but where is
my troth
Of yesternight with Tune: can one cleave to
both?"
—"Be not perturbed," said she. "Though
apart in fame,
As I and my sisters are one, those, too, are the
same.

—"But my loves go further—to Story, and Dance, and Hymn,
The lover of all in a sun-sweep is fool to whim—
Is swayed like a river-weed as the ripples run!"
—"Nay, wooer, thou sway'st not. These are but phases of one;

"And that one is I; and I am projected from thee,
One that out of thy brain and heart thou causest to be—
Extern to thee nothing. Grieve not, nor thyself becall,
Woo where thou wilt; and rejoice thou canst love at all!"

ROME

AT THE PYRAMID OF CESTIUS NEAR THE GRAVES OF SHELLEY AND KEATS

(1887)

WHO, then, was Cestius,
And what is he to me?—
Amid thick thoughts and memories multitudinous
One thought alone brings he.

I can recall no word
Of anything he did;
For me he is a man who died and was in terred
To leave a pyramid

Whose purpose was exprest
Not with its first design,
Nor till, far down in Time, beside it found their rest
Two countrymen of mine.

Cestius in life, maybe,
Slew, breathed out threatening;
I know not. This I know: in death all silently
He does a kindlier thing,

In beckoning pilgrim feet
With marble finger high
To where, by shadowy wall and history-haunted street,
Those matchless singers lie. . . .

—Say, then, he lived and died
That stones which bear his name
Should mark, through Time, where two immortal Shades abide;
It is an ample fame.

LAUSANNE

IN GIBBON'S OLD GARDEN: 11–12 P.M.

June 27, 1897

(*The 110th anniversary of the completion of the "Decline and Fall" at the same hour and place*)

A SPIRIT seems to pass,
Formal in pose, but grave withal and grand:
He contemplates a volume in his hand,
And far lamps fleck him through the thin acacias.

Anon the book is closed,
With "It is finished!" And at the alley's end
He turns, and soon on me his glances bend;
And, as from earth, comes speech—small, muted, yet composed.

"How fares the Truth now?—Ill?
—Do pens but slily further her advance?
May one not speed her but in phrase askance?
Do scribes aver the Comic to be Reverend still?

"Still rule those minds on earth
At whom sage Milton's wormwood words were hurled:
*'Truth like a bastard comes into the world
Never without ill-fame to him who gives her birth'?"*

ZERMATT

TO THE MATTERHORN

(*June–July*, 1897)

THIRTY-TWO years since, up against the sun,
Seven shapes, thin atomies to lower sight,
Labouringly leapt and gained thy gabled height,
And four lives paid for what the seven had won.

They were the first by whom the deed was
 done,
And when I look at thee, my mind takes
 flight
To that day's tragic feat of manly might,
As though, till then, of history thou hadst
 none.

Yet ages ere men topped thee, late and
 soon
Thou watch'dst each night the planets lift
 and lower ;
Thou gleam'dst to Joshua's pausing sun and
 moon,
And brav'dst the tokening sky when Cæsar's
 power
Approached its bloody end : yea, saw'st that
 Noon
When darkness filled the earth till the ninth
 hour.

THE BRIDGE OF LODI *

(*Spring*, 1887)

I

WHEN of tender mind and body
I was moved by minstrelsy,
And that strain "The Bridge of Lodi"
Brought a strange delight to me.

* Pronounce "Loddy."

II

In the battle-breathing jingle
Of its forward-footing tune
I could see the armies mingle,
And the columns crushed and hewn

III

On that far-famed spot by Lodi
Where Napoleon clove his way
To his fame, when like a god he
Bent the nations to his sway.

IV

Hence the tune came capering to me
While I traced the Rhone and Po;
Nor could Milan's Marvel woo me
From the spot englamoured so.

V

And to-day, sunlit and smiling,
Here I stand upon the scene,
With its saffron walls, dun tiling,
And its meads of maiden green,

VI

Even as when the trackway thundered
With the charge of grenadiers,
And the blood of forty hundred
Splashed its parapets and piers. . . .

VII

Any ancient crone I'd toady
Like a lass in young-eyed prime,
Could she tell some tale of Lodi
At that moving mighty time.

VIII

So, I ask the wives of Lodi
For traditions of that day;
But alas! not anybody
Seems to know of such a fray.

IX

And they heed but transitory
Marketings in cheese and meat,
Till I judge that Lodi's story
Is extinct in Lodi's street.

X

Yet while here and there they thrid them
In their zest to sell and buy,
Let me sit me down amid them
And behold those thousands die. . . .

XI

—Not a creature cares in Lodi
How Napoleon swept each arch,
Or where up and downward trod he,
Or for his memorial march!

XII

So that wherefore should I be here,
Watching Adda lip the lea,
When the whole romance to see here
Is the dream I bring with me?

XIII

And why sing "The Bridge of Lodi"
As I sit thereon and swing,
When none shows by smile or nod he
Guesses why or what I sing? . . .

XIV

Since all Lodi, low and head ones,
Seem to pass that story by,
It may be the Lodi-bred ones
Rate it truly, and not I.

XV

Once engrossing Bridge of Lodi,
Is thy claim to glory gone?
Must I pipe a palinody,
Or be silent thereupon?

XVI

And if here, from strand to steeple,
Be no stone to fame the fight,
Must I say the Lodi people
Are but viewing crime aright? . .

XVII

Nay; I'll sing "The Bridge of Lodi"—
That long-loved, romantic thing,
Though none show by smile or nod he
Guesses why and what I sing!

ON AN INVITATION TO THE UNITED STATES

I

MY ardours for emprize nigh lost
Since Life has bared its bones
to me,
I shrink to seek a modern coast
Whose riper times have yet to be;
Where the new regions claim them free
From that long drip of human tears
Which peoples old in tragedy
Have left upon the centuried years.

II

For, wonning in these ancient lands,
Enchased and lettered as a tomb,
And scored with prints of perished hands,
And chronicled with dates of doom,
Though my own Being bear no bloom
I trace the lives such scenes enshrine,
Give past exemplars present room,
And their experience count as mine.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

THE MOTHER MOURNS

WHEN mid-autumn's moan shook the
night-time,
And sedges were horny,
And summer's green wonderwork faltered
On leaze and in lane,

I fared Yell'ham-Firs way, where dimly
Came wheeling around me
Those phantoms obscure and insistent
That shadows unchain.

Till airs from the needle-thicks brought me
    A low lamentation,
As 'twere of a tree-god disheartened,
    Perplexed, or in pain.

And, heeding, it awed me to gather
    That Nature herself there
Was breathing in aërie accents,
    With dirgeful refrain,

Weary plaint that Mankind, in these late days,
    Had grieved her by holding
Her ancient high fame of perfection
    In doubt and disdain. . . .

—"I had not proposed me a Creature
    (She soughed) so excelling
All else of my kingdom in compass
    And brightness of brain

"As to read my defects with a god-glance,
    Uncover each vestige
Of old inadvertence, annunciate
    Each flaw and each stain!

"My purpose went not to develop
Such insight in Earthland;
Such potent appraisements affront me,
And sadden my reign!

"Why loosened I olden control here
To mechanize skywards,
Undeeming great scope could outshape in
A globe of such grain?

"Man's mountings of mind-sight I checked not,
Till range of his vision
Has topped my intent, and found blemish
Throughout my domain.

"He holds as inept his own soul-shell—
My deftest achievement—
Contemns me for fitful inventions
Ill-timed and inane:

"No more sees my sun as a Sanct-shape,
My moon as the Night-queen,
My stars as august and sublime ones
That influences rain:

"Reckons gross and ignoble my teaching,
 Immoral my story,
My love-lights a lure, that my species
 May gather and gain.

"'Give me,' he has said, 'but the matter
 And means the gods lot her,
My brain could evolve a creation
 More seemly, more sane.'

—"If ever a naughtiness seized me
 To woo adulation
From creatures more keen than those crude ones
 That first formed my train—

"If inly a moment I murmured,
 'The simple praise sweetly,
But sweetlier the sage'—and did rashly
 Man's vision unrein,

"I rue it! . . . His guileless forerunners,
 Whose brains I could blandish,

To measure the deeps of my mysteries
    Applied them in vain.

"From them my waste aimings and futile
    I subtly could cover;
'Every best thing,' said they, 'to best purpose
    Her powers preordain.'—

"No more such! . . . My species are dwindling,
    My forests grow barren,
My popinjays fail from their tappings,
    My larks from their strain.

"My leopardine beauties are rarer,
    My tusky ones vanish,
My children have aped mine own slaughters
    To quicken my wane.

"Let me grow, then, but mildews and mandrakes,
    And slimy distortions,
Let nevermore things good and lovely
    To me appertain;

"For Reason is rank in my temples,
  And Vision unruly,
And chivalrous laud of my cunning
  Is heard not again!"

"I SAID TO LOVE

I SAID to Love,
  "It is not now as in old days
When men adored thee and thy ways
        All else above;
Named thee the Boy, the Bright, the One
Who spread a heaven beneath the sun,"
        I said to Love.

I said to him,
"We now know more of thee than then;
We were but weak in judgment when,
With hearts abrim,
We clamoured thee that thou would'st please
Inflict on us thine agonies,"
I said to him.

I said to Love,
"Thou art not young, thou art not fair,
No faery darts, no cherub air,
Nor swan, nor dove
Are thine; but features pitiless,
And iron daggers of distress,"
I said to Love.

"Depart then, Love!...
Man's race shall perish, threatenest thou,
Without thy kindling coupling-vow?
The age to come the man of now
Know nothing of?—
We fear not such a threat from thee;
We are too old in apathy!
Mankind shall cease.—So let it be,"
I said to Love.

A COMMONPLACE DAY

THE day is turning ghost,
And scuttles from the kalendar in fits and furtively,
To join the anonymous host
Of those that throng oblivion; ceding his place, maybe,
To one of like degree.

I part the fire-gnawed logs,
Rake forth the embers, spoil the busy flames, and lay the ends
Upon the shining dogs;
Further and further from the nooks the twilight's stride extends,
And beamless black impends.

Nothing of tiniest worth
Have I wrought, pondered, planned; no one thing asking blame or praise,
Since the pale corpse-like birth
Of this diurnal unit, bearing blanks in all its rays—
Dullest of dull-hued Days!

Wanly upon the panes
The rain slides as have slid since morn my colourless thoughts; and yet
Here, while Day's presence wanes,
And over him the sepulchre-lid is slowly lowered and set,
He wakens my regret.

Regret—though nothing dear
That I wot of, was toward in the wide world at his prime,
Or bloomed elsewhere than here,
To die with his decease, and leave a memory sweet, sublime,
Or mark him out in Time. . . .

—Yet, maybe, in some soul,
In some spot undiscerned on sea or land, some impulse rose,
Or some intent upstole
Of that enkindling ardency from whose maturer glows
The world's amendment flows;

But which, benumbed at birth
By momentary chance or wile, has missed its hope to be
Embodied on the earth;
And undervoicings of this loss to man's futurity
May wake regret in me.

AT A LUNAR ECLIPSE

THY shadow, Earth, from Pole to Central Sea,
Now steals along upon the Moon's meek shine
In even monochrome and curving line
Of imperturbable serenity.

How shall I link such sun-cast symmetry
With the torn troubled form I know as thine,

That profile, placid as a brow divine,
With continents of moil and misery?

And can immense Mortality but throw
So small a shade, and Heaven's high human scheme
Be hemmed within the coasts yon arc implies?

Is such the stellar gauge of earthly show,
Nation at war with nation, brains that teem,
Heroes, and women fairer than the skies?

THE LACKING SENSE

SCENE.—*A sad-coloured landscape, Waddon Vale*

I

"O TIME, whence comes the Mother's
moody look amid her labours,
As of one who all unwittingly has wounded
where she loves?
Why weaves she not her world-webs to
according lutes and tabors,
With nevermore this too remorseful air upon
her face,
As of angel fallen from grace?"

II

—"Her look is but her story: construe not
its symbols keenly:
In her wonderworks yea surely has she
wounded where she loves.
The sense of ills misdealt for blisses blanks
the mien most queenly,
Self-smitings kill self-joys; and everywhere
beneath the sun
Such deeds her hands have done"

III

—"And how explains thy Ancient Mind her
crimes upon her creatures,
These fallings from her fair beginnings,
woundings where she loves,
Into her would-be perfect motions, modes,
effects, and features
Admitting cramps, black humours, wan
decay, and baleful blights,
Distress into delights?"

IV

—"Ah! know'st thou not her secret yet, her vainly veiled deficience,
Whence it comes that all unwittingly she wounds the lives she loves?
That sightless are those orbs of hers?—which bar to her omniscience
Brings those fearful unfulfilments, that red ravage through her zones
Whereat all creation groans.

V

"She whispers it in each pathetic strenuous slow endeavour,
When in mothering she unwittingly sets wounds on what she loves;
Yet her primal doom pursues her, faultful, fatal is she ever;
Though so deft and nigh to vision is her facile finger-touch
That the seers marvel much.

VI

"Deal, then, her groping skill no scorn, no
note of malediction;
Not long on thee will press the hand that
hurts the lives it loves;
And while she plods dead-reckoning on, in
darkness of affliction,
Assist her where thy creaturely dependence
can or may,
For thou art of her clay."

TO LIFE

O LIFE with the sad seared face,
I weary of seeing thee,
And thy draggled cloak, and thy hobbling pace,
And thy too-forced pleasantry!

I know what thou would'st tell
Of Death, Time, Destiny—
I have known it long, and know, too, well
What it all means for me.

But canst thou not array
Thyself in rare disguise,
And feign like truth, for one mad day,
That Earth is Paradise?

I'll tune me to the mood,
And mumm with thee till eve;
And maybe what as interlude
I feign, I shall believe!

DOOM AND SHE

I

THERE dwells a mighty pair—
Slow, statuesque, intense—
Amid the vague Immense:
None can their chronicle declare,
Nor why they be, nor whence.

II

Mother of all things made,
Matchless in artistry,
Unlit with sight is she.—
And though her ever well-obeyed
Vacant of feeling he.

III

The Matron mildly asks—
A throb in every word—
"Our clay-made creatures, lord,
How fare they in their mortal tasks
Upon Earth's bounded bord?

IV

"The fate of those I bear,
Dear lord, pray turn and view,
And notify me true;
Shapings that eyelessly I dare
Maybe I would undo.

V

"Sometimes from lairs of life
Methinks I catch a groan,
Or multitudinous moan,

As though I had schemed a world of strife,
Working by touch alone."

VI

"World-weaver!" he replies,
"I scan all thy domain;
But since nor joy nor pain
It lies in me to recognize,
Thy questionings are vain.

VII

"World-weaver! what *is* Grief?
And what are Right, and Wrong,
And Feeling, that belong
To creatures all who owe thee fief?
Why is Weak worse than Strong?"..

VIII

—Unanswered, curious, meek,
She broods in sad surmise....
—Some say they have heard her sighs
On Alpine height or Polar peak
When the night tempests rise.

THE PROBLEM

SHALL we conceal the Case, or tell it—
We who believe the evidence?
Here and there the watch-towers knell it
With a sullen significance,
Heard of the few who hearken intently and carry an eagerly upstrained sense.

Hearts that are happiest hold not by it;
Better we let, then, the old view reign;
Since there is peace in it, why decry it?
Since there is comfort, why disdain?
Note not the pigment so long as the painting
determines humanity's joy and pain!

THE SUBALTERNS

I

"POOR wanderer," said the leaden sky,
"I fain would lighten thee,
But there are laws in force on high
Which say it must not be."

II

—"I would not freeze thee, shorn one," cried
The North, "knew I but how

To warm my breath, to slack my stride ;
    But I am ruled as thou."

III

—"To-morrow I attack thee, wight,"
    Said Sickness. "Yet I swear
I bear thy little ark no spite,
    But am bid enter there."

IV

—"Come hither, Son," I heard Death say ;
    "I did not will a grave
Should end thy pilgrimage to-day,
    But I, too, am a slave !"

We smiled upon each other then,
    And life to me had less
Of that fell look it wore ere when
    They owned their passiveness.

THE SLEEP-WORKER

WHEN wilt thou wake, O Mother, wake and see—
As one who, held in trance, has laboured long
By vacant rote and prepossession strong—
The coils that thou hast wrought unwittingly;

Wherein have place, unrealized by thee,
Fair growths, foul cankers, right enmeshed with wrong,
Strange orchestras of victim-shriek and song,
And curious blends of ache and ecstasy?—

Should that morn come, and show thy opened
eyes
All that Life's palpitating tissues feel,
How wilt thou bear thyself in thy surprise?—

Wilt thou destroy, in one wild shock of shame,
Thy whole high heaving firmamental frame,
Or patiently adjust, amend, and heal?

THE BULLFINCHES

BROTHER Bulleys, let us sing
  From the dawn till evening !—
For we know not that we go not
 When to-day's pale pinions fold
 Where they be that sang of old.

 When I flew to Blackmoor Vale,
 Whence the green-gowned faeries hail,
Roosting near them I could hear them
 Speak of queenly Nature's ways,
 Means, and moods,—well known to fays.

All we creatures, nigh and far
(Said they there), the Mother's are:
Yet she never shows endeavour
To protect from warrings wild
Bird or beast she calls her child.

Busy in her handsome house
Known as Space, she falls a-drowse;
Yet, in seeming, works on dreaming,
While beneath her groping hands
Fiends make havoc in her bands.

How her hussif'ry succeeds
She unknows or she unheeds,
All things making for Death's taking!
—So the green-gowned faeries say
Living over Blackmoor way.

Come then, brethren, let us sing,
From the dawn till evening!—
For we know not that we go not
When the day's pale pinions fold
Unto those who sang of old.

GOD-FORGOTTEN

I TOWERED far, and lo! I stood within
The presence of the Lord Most High,
Sent thither by the sons of earth, to win
Some answer to their cry.

—"The Earth, say'st thou? The Human race?
By Me created? Sad its lot?
Nay: I have no remembrance of such place:
Such world I fashioned not."—

—"O Lord, forgive me when I say
Thou spakest the word that made it all."—
"The Earth of men—let me bethink me. . . . Yea!
I dimly do recall

"Some tiny sphere I built long back
(Mid millions of such shapes of mine)
So named . . . It perished, surely—not a wrack
Remaining, or a sign?

"It lost my interest from the first,
My aims therefor succeeding ill;
Haply it died of doing as it durst?"—
"Lord, it existeth still."—

"Dark, then, its life! For not a cry
Of aught it bears do I now hear;
Of its own act the threads were snapt whereby
Its plaints had reached mine ear.

"It used to ask for gifts of good,
Till came its severance self-entailed,

When sudden silence on that side ensued,
And has till now prevailed.

"All other orbs have kept in touch;
Their voicings reach me speedily:
Thy people took upon them overmuch
In sundering them from me!

"And it is strange—though sad enough—
Earth's race should think that one whose call
Frames, daily, shining spheres of flawless stuff
Must heed their tainted ball! . . .

"But say'st thou 'tis by pangs distraught,
And strife, and silent suffering?—
Deep grieved am I that injury should be wrought
Even on so poor a thing!

"Thou should'st have learnt that *Not to Mend*
For Me could mean but *Not to Know*:
Hence, Messengers! and straightway put an end
To what men undergo." . . .

Homing at dawn, I thought to see
One of the Messengers standing by.
—Oh, childish thought! . . . Yet oft it comes to me
When trouble hovers nigh.

THE BEDRIDDEN PEASANT

TO AN UNKNOWING GOD

MUCH wonder I—here long low-laid-
That this dead wall should be
Betwixt the Maker and the made,
Between Thyself and me!

For, say one puts a child to nurse,
He eyes it now and then
To know if better 'tis, or worse,
And if it mourn, and when.

But Thou, Lord, giv'st us men our day
    In helpless bondage thus
To Time and Chance, and seem'st straightway
    To think no more of us!

That some disaster cleft Thy scheme
    And tore us wide apart,
So that no cry can cross, I deem;
    For Thou art mild of heart,

And would'st not shape and shut us in
    Where voice can not be heard:
'Tis plain Thou meant'st that we should win
    Thy succour by a word.

Might but Thy sense flash down the skies
    Like man's from clime to clime,
Thou would'st not let me agonize
    Through my remaining time;

But, seeing how much Thy creatures bear—
    Lame, starved, or maimed, or blind—
Thou'dst heal the ills with quickest care
    Of me and all my kind.

Then, since Thou mak'st not these things be,
    But these things dost not know,
I'll praise Thee as were shown to me
    The mercies Thou would'st show!

BY THE EARTH'S CORPSE

I

"O LORD, why grievest Thou?—
Since Life has ceased to be
Upon this globe, now cold
As lunar land and sea,
And humankind, and fowl, and fur
Are gone eternally,
All is the same to Thee as ere
They knew mortality."

II

"O Time," replied the Lord,
"Thou read'st me ill, I ween;
Were all *the same*, I should not grieve
At that late earthly scene,
Now blestly past—though planned by me
With interest close and keen!—
Nay, nay: things now are *not* the same
As they have earlier been.

III

"Written indelibly
On my eternal mind
Are all the wrongs endured
By Earth's poor patient kind,
Which my too oft unconscious hand
Let enter undesigned.
No god can cancel deeds foredone,
Or thy old coils unwind!

IV

"As when, in Noë's days,
I whelmed the plains with sea,

So at this last, when flesh
And herb but fossils be,
And, all extinct, their piteous dust
Revolves obliviously,
That I made Earth, and life, and man,
It still repenteth me!"

MUTE OPINION

I

I TRAVERSED a dominion
  Whose spokesmen spake out strong
Their purpose and opinion
Through pulpit, press, and song.
I scarce had means to note there
A large-eyed few, and dumb,
Who thought not as those thought there
That stirred the heat and hum.

II

When, grown a Shade, beholding
That land in lifetime trode,
To learn if its unfolding
Fulfilled its clamoured code,
I saw, in web unbroken,
Its history outwrought
Not as the loud had spoken,
But as the mute had thought.

TO AN UNBORN PAUPER CHILD

I

BREATHE not, hid Heart: cease silently,
And though thy birth-hour beckons thee,
Sleep the long sleep:
The Doomsters heap
Travails and teens around us here,
And Time-wraiths turn our songsingings to fear.

II

Hark, how the peoples surge and sigh,
And laughters fail, and greetings die:
Hopes dwindle; yea,
Faiths waste away,
Affections and enthusiasms numb;
Thou canst not mend these things if thou dost come.

III

Had I the ear of wombèd souls
Ere their terrestrial chart unrolls,
And thou wert free
To cease, or be,
Then would I tell thee all I know,
And put it to thee: Wilt thou take Life so?

IV

Vain vow! No hint of mine may hence
To theeward fly: to thy locked sense
Explain none can
Life's pending plan:
Thou wilt thy ignorant entry make
Though skies spout fire and blood and nations quake.

V

Fain would I, dear, find some shut plot
Of earth's wide wold for thee, where not
One tear, one qualm,
Should break the calm.
But I am weak as thou and bare;
No man can change the common lot to rare.

VI

Must come and bide. And such are we—
Unreasoning, sanguine, visionary—
That I can hope
Health, love, friends, scope
In full for thee; can dream thou'lt find
Joys seldom yet attained by humankind!

TO FLOWERS FROM ITALY IN WINTER

SUNNED in the South, and here to-day;
—If all organic things
Be sentient, Flowers, as some men say,
What are your ponderings?

How can you stay, nor vanish quite
From this bleak spot of thorn,
And birch, and fir, and frozen white
Expanse of the forlorn?

Frail luckless exiles hither brought!
  Your dust will not regain
Old sunny haunts of Classic thought
  When you shall waste and wane;

But mix with alien earth, be lit
  With frigid Boreal flame,
And not a sign remain in it
  To tell men whence you came.

ON A FINE MORNING

I

WHENCE comes Solace ?—Not
from seeing
What is doing, suffering, being,
Not from noting Life's conditions,
Nor from heeding Time's monitions ;
But in cleaving to the Dream,
And in gazing at the gleam
Whereby gray things golden seem.

II

Thus do I this heyday, holding
Shadows but as lights unfolding,
As no specious show this moment
With its irisèd embowment;
    But as nothing other than
    Part of a benignant plan;
    Proof that earth was made for man.

February 1899.

TO LIZBIE BROWNE

I

DEAR Lizbie Browne,
Where are you now?
In sun, in rain?—
Or is your brow
Past joy, past pain,
Dear Lizbie Browne?

II

Sweet Lizbie Browne
How you could smile,
How you could sing!—
How archly wile
In glance-giving,
Sweet Lizbie Browne!

III

And, Lizbie Browne,
Who else had hair
Bay-red as yours,
Or flesh so fair
Bred out of doors,
Sweet Lizbie Browne?

IV

When, Lizbie Browne,
You had just begun
To be endeared
By stealth to one,
You disappeared
My Lizbie Browne!

V

Ay, Lizbie Browne,
So swift your life,
And mine so slow,
You were a wife
Ere I could show
Love, Lizbie Browne.

VI

Still, Lizbie Browne,
You won, they said,
The best of men
When you were wed. . .
Where went you then,
O Lizbie Browne?

VII

Dear Lizbie Browne,
I should have thought,
"Girls ripen fast,"
And coaxed and caught
You ere you passed,
Dear Lizbie Browne!

VIII

But, Lizbie Browne,
I let you slip;
Shaped not a sign;
Touched never your lip
With lip of mine,
Lost Lizbie Browne!

IX

So, Lizbie Browne,
When on a day
Men speak of me
As not, you'll say,
"And who was he?"—
Yes, Lizbie Browne!

SONG OF HOPE

O SWEET To-morrow!—
After to-day
There will away
This sense of sorrow.
Then let us borrow
Hope, for a gleaming
Soon will be streaming,
Dimmed by no gray—
No gray!

While the winds wing us
Sighs from The Gone,
Nearer to dawn
Minute-beats bring us;
When there will sing us
Larks of a glory
Waiting our story
Further anon—
Anon!

Doff the black token,
Don the red shoon,
Right and retune
Viol-strings broken;
Null the words spoken
In speeches of rueing,
The night cloud is hueing,
To-morrow shines soon—
Shines soon!

THE WELL-BELOVED

I WAYED by star and planet shine
Towards the dear one's home
At Kingsbere, there to make her mine
When the next sun upclomb.

I edged the ancient hill and wood
Beside the Ikling Way,
Nigh where the Pagan temple stood
In the world's earlier day.

And as I quick and quicker walked
    On gravel and on green,
I sang to sky, and tree, or talked
    Of her I called my queen.

—"O faultless is her dainty form,
    And luminous her mind;
She is the God-created norm
    Of perfect womankind!"

A shape whereon one star-blink gleamed
    Slid softly by my side,
A woman's; and her motion seemed
    The motion of my bride.

And yet methought she'd drawn erstwhile
    Adown the ancient leaze,
Where once were pile and peristyle
    For men's idolatries.

—"O maiden lithe and lone, what may
    Thy name and lineage be,
Who so resemblest by this ray
    My darling?—Art thou she?"

The Shape: "Thy bride remains within
    Her father's grange and grove."
—"Thou speakest rightly," I broke in,
    Thou art not she I love."

—"Nay: though thy bride remains inside
    Her father's walls," said she,
"The one most dear is with thee here,
    For thou dost love but me."

Then I: "But she, my only choice,
    Is now at Kingsbere Grove?"
Again her soft mysterious voice:
    "I am thy only Love."

Thus still she vouched, and still I said,
    "O sprite, that cannot be!" . . .
It was as if my bosom bled,
    So much she troubled me.

The sprite resumed: "Thou hast transferred
    To her dull form awhile
My beauty, fame, and deed, and word,
    My gestures and my smile.

"O fatuous man, this truth infer,
Brides are not what they seem;
Thou lovest what thou dreamest her;
I am thy very dream!"

—"O then," I answered miserably,
Speaking as scarce I knew,
"My loved one, I must wed with thee
If what thou say'st be true!"

She, proudly, thinning in the gloom:
"Though, since troth-plight began,
I've ever stood as bride to groom,
I wed no mortal man!"

Thereat she vanished by the Cross
That, entering Kingsbere town,
The two long lanes form, near the fosse
Below the faneless Down.

—When I arrived and met my bride,
Her look was pinched and thin,
As if her soul had shrunk and died,
And left a waste within.

HER REPROACH

CON the dead page as 'twere live love: press on!
Cold wisdom's words will ease thy track for thee;
Aye, go; cast off sweet ways, and leave me wan
To biting blasts that are intent on me.

But if thy object Fame's far summits be,
Whose inclines many a skeleton o'erlies
That missed both dream and substance, stop
and see
How absence wears these cheeks and dims
these eyes!

It surely is far sweeter and more wise
To water love, than toil to leave anon
A name whose glory-gleam will but advise
Invidious minds to eclipse it with their own,

And over which the kindliest will but stay
A moment, musing, "He, too, had his day!"

Westbourne Park Villas,
1867

THE INCONSISTENT

I SAY, "She was as good as fair,"
When standing by her mound;
"Such passing sweetness," I declare,
"No longer treads the ground."
I say, "What living Love can catch
Her bloom and bonhomie,
And what in newer maidens match
Her olden warmth to me!"

—There stands within yon vestry-nook
  Where bonded lovers sign,
Her name upon a faded book
  With one that is not mine.
To him she breathed the tender vow
  She once had breathed to me,
But yet I say, "O love, even now
  Would I had died for thee!"

A BROKEN APPOINTMENT

YOU did not come,
And marching Time drew on, and wore me numb.—
Yet less for loss of your dear presence there
Than that I thus found lacking in your make
That high compassion which can overbear
Reluctance for pure lovingkindness' sake
Grieved I, when, as the hope-hour stroked its sum,
You did not come.

You love not me,
And love alone can lend you loyalty ;
—I know and knew it. But, unto the store
Of human deeds divine in all but name,
Was it not worth a little hour or more
To add yet this : Once, you, a woman, came
To soothe a time-torn man ; even though it be
You love not me ?

"BETWEEN US NOW"

BETWEEN us now and here—
Two thrown together
Who are not wont to wear
Life's flushest feather—
Who see the scenes slide past,
The daytimes dimming fast,
Let there be truth at last,
Even if despair.

So thoroughly and long
    Have you now known me,
So real in faith and strong
    Have I now shown me,
That nothing needs disguise
Further in any wise,
Or asks or justifies
    A guarded tongue.

Face unto face, then, say,
    Eyes my own meeting,
Is your heart far away,
    Or with mine beating?
When false things are brought low,
And swift things have grown slow,
Feigning like froth shall go,
    Faith be for aye.

"HOW GREAT MY GRIEF"

(TRIOLET)

HOW great my grief, my joys how few,
Since first it was my fate to know thee!
—Have the slow years not brought to view
How great my grief, my joys how few,
Nor memory shaped old times anew,
Nor loving-kindness helped to show thee
How great my grief, my joys how few,
Since first it was my fate to know thee?

"I NEED NOT GO"

I NEED not go
Through sleet and snow
To where I know
She waits for me;
She will tarry me there
Till I find it fair,
And have time to spare
From company.

When I've overgot
The world somewhat,
When things cost not
Such stress and strain,

Is soon enough
By cypress sough
To tell my Love
I am come again.

And if some day,
When none cries nay,
I still delay
To seek her side,
(Though ample measure
Of fitting leisure
Await my pleasure)
She will not chide.

What—not upbraid me
That I delayed me,
Nor ask what stayed me
So long? Ah, no!—
New cares may claim me
New loves inflame me,
She will not blame me,
But suffer it so.

THE COQUETTE, AND AFTER

(TRIOLETS)

I

FOR long the cruel wish I knew
That your free heart should ache for me
While mine should bear no ache for you;
For, long—the cruel wish!—I knew
How men can feel, and craved to view
My triumph—fated not to be
For long! . . . The cruel wish I knew
That your free heart should ache for me!

II

At last one pays the penalty—
The woman—women always do.
My farce, I found, was tragedy
At last!—One pays the penalty
With interest when one, fancy-free,
Learns love, learns shame. . . . Of sinners two
At last *one* pays the penalty—
The woman—women always do!

A SPOT

IN years defaced and lost,
Two sat here, transport-tossed,
Lit by a living love
The wilted world knew nothing of:
Scared momently
By gaingivings,
Then hoping things
That could not be.

Of love and us no trace
Abides upon the place;
The sun and shadows wheel,
Season and season sereward steal;
Foul days and fair
Here, too, prevail,
And gust and gale
As everywhere.

But lonely shepherd souls
Who bask amid these knolls
May catch a faery sound
On sleepy noontides from the ground:
"O not again
Till Earth outwears
Shall love like theirs
Suffuse this glen!"

LONG PLIGHTED

IS it worth while, dear, now,
To call for bells, and sally forth arrayed
For marriage-rites — discussed, decried, delayed
So many years?

Is it worth while, dear, now,
To stir desire for old fond purposings,
By feints that Time still serves for dallyings,
Though quittance nears?

Is it worth while, dear, when
The day being so far spent, so low the sun,
The undone thing will soon be as the done,
And smiles as tears?

Is it worth while, dear, when
Our cheeks are worn, our early brown is gray;
When, meet or part we, none says yea or nay,
Or heeds, or cares?

Is it worth while, dear, since
We still can climb old Yell'ham's wooded mounds
Together, as each season steals its rounds
And disappears?

Is it worth while, dear, since
As mates in Mellstock churchyard we can lie,
Till the last crash of all things low and high
Shall end the spheres?

THE WIDOW

BY Mellstock Lodge and Avenue
  Towards her door I went,
And sunset on her window-panes
  Reflected our intent.

The creeper on the gable nigh
  Was fired to more than red
And when I came to halt thereby
  "Bright as my joy!" I said.

Of late days it had been her aim
  To meet me in the hall;
Now at my footsteps no one came,
  And no one to my call.

Again I knocked, and tardily
  An inner step was heard,
And I was shown her presence then
  With scarce an answering word.

She met me, and but barely took
  My proffered warm embrace;
Preoccupation weighed her look,
  And hardened her sweet face.

"To-morrow—could you—would you call?
  Make brief your present stay?
My child is ill—my one, my all!—
  And can't be left to-day."

And then she turns, and gives commands
  As I were out of sound,
Or were no more to her and hers
  Than any neighbour round. . . .

—As maid I wooed her ; but one came
And coaxed her heart away,
And when in time he wedded her
I deemed her gone for aye.

He won, I lost her ; and my loss
I bore I know not how ;
But I do think I suffered then
Less wretchedness than now.

For Time, in taking him, had oped
An unexpected door
Of bliss for me, which grew to seem
Far surer than before. . . .

Her word is steadfast, and I know
That plighted firm are we :
But she has caught new love-calls since
She smiled as maid on me !

AT A HASTY WEDDING

(TRIOLET)

IF hours be years the twain are blest,
For now they solace swift desire
By bonds of every bond the best,
If hours be years. The twain are blest
Do eastern stars slope never west,
Nor pallid ashes follow fire :
If hours be years the twain are blest,
For now they solace swift desire.

THE DREAM-FOLLOWER

A DREAM of mine flew over the mead
To the halls where my old Love reigns;
And it drew me on to follow its lead:
And I stood at her window-panes;

And I saw but a thing of flesh and bone
Speeding on to its cleft in the clay;
And my dream was scared, and expired on a moan,
And I whitely hastened away.

HIS IMMORTALITY

I

I SAW a dead man's finer part
Shining within each faithful heart
Of those bereft. Then said I: "This must be
His immortality."

II

I looked there as the seasons wore,
And still his soul continuously upbore
Its life in theirs. But less its shine excelled
Than when I first beheld.

III

His fellow-yearsmen passed, and then
In later hearts I looked for him again;
And found him—shrunk, alas! into a thin
And spectral mannikin.

IV

Lastly I ask—now old and chill—
If aught of him remain unperished still;
And find, in me alone, a feeble spark,
Dying amid the dark.

February 1899.

THE TO-BE-FORGOTTEN

I

I HEARD a small sad sound,
And stood awhile amid the tombs around:
"Wherefore, old friends," said I, "are ye distrest,
Now, screened from life's unrest?"

II

—"O not at being here;
But that our future second death is drear;
When, with the living, memory of us numbs,
And blank oblivion comes!

III

"Those who our grandsires be
Lie here embraced by deeper death than we;
Nor shape nor thought of theirs canst thou
descry
With keenest backward eye.

IV

"They bide as quite forgot;
They are as men who have existed not;
Theirs is a loss past loss of fitful breath;
It is the second death.

V

"We here, as yet, each day
Are blest with dear recall; as yet, alway
In some soul hold a loved continuance
Of shape and voice and glance.

VI

"But what has been will be—
First memory, then oblivion's turbid sea;
Like men foregone, shall we merge into those
Whose story no one knows.

VII

"For which of us could hope
To show in life that world-awakening scope
Granted the few whose memory none lets die,
But all men magnify?

VIII

"We were but Fortune's sport;
Things true, things lovely, things of good report
We neither shunned nor sought . . . We see our bourne,
And seeing it we mourn."

WIVES IN THE SERE

I

NEVER a careworn wife but shows,
    If a joy suffuse her,
Something beautiful to those
    Patient to peruse her,
Some one charm the world unknows
    Precious to a muser,
Haply what, ere years were foes,
    Moved her mate to choose her.

II

But, be it a hint of rose
    That an instant hues her,
Or some early light or pose
    Wherewith thought renews her—
Seen by him at full, ere woes
    Practised to abuse her—
Sparely comes it, swiftly goes,
    Time again subdues her.

THE SUPERSEDED

I

As newer comers crowd the fore,
We drop behind.
—We who have laboured long and sore
Times out of mind,
And keen are yet, must not regret
To drop behind.

II

Yet there are some of us who grieve
To go behind;
Staunch, strenuous souls who scarce believe
Their fires declined,
And know none cares, remembers, spares
Who go behind.

III

'Tis not that we have unforetold
The drop behind;
We feel the new must oust the old
In every kind;
But yet we think, must we, must *we*,
Too, drop behind?

AN AUGUST MIDNIGHT

I

A SHADED lamp and a waving blind,
And the beat of a clock from a distant floor:
On this scene enter — winged, horned, and spined—
A longlegs, a moth, and a dumbledore;
While 'mid my page there idly stands
A sleepy fly, that rubs its hands . . .

II

Thus meet we five, in this still place,
At this point of time, at this point in space.
—My guests parade my new-penned ink,
Or bang at the lamp-glass, whirl, and sink.
"God's humblest, they!" I muse. Yet why?
They know Earth-secrets that know not I.

MAX GATE, 1899.

THE CAGED THRUSH FREED AND HOME AGAIN

(VILLANELLE)

"MEN know but little more than we,
Who count us least of things terrene,
How happy days are made to be!

"Of such strange tidings what think ye,
O birds in brown that peck and preen?
Men know but little more than we!

"When I was borne from yonder tree
In bonds to them, I hoped to glean
How happy days are made to be,

"And want and wailing turned to glee;
Alas, despite their mighty mien
Men know but little more than we!

"They cannot change the Frost's decree,
They cannot keep the skies serene;
How happy days are made to be

"Eludes great Man's sagacity
No less than ours, O tribes in treen!
Men know but little more than we
How happy days are made to be."

BIRDS AT WINTER NIGHTFALL

(TRIOLET)

AROUND the house the flakes fly faster,
And all the berries now are gone
From holly and cotonea-aster
Around the house. The flakes fly!—faster
Shutting indoors that crumb-outcaster
We used to see upon the lawn
Around the house. The flakes fly faster,
And all the berries now are gone!

MAX GATE.

THE PUZZLED GAME-BIRDS

(TRIOLET)

THEY are not those who used to feed us
  When we were young—they cannot be—
These shapes that now bereave and bleed us?
They are not those who used to feed us,—
For would they not fair terms concede us?
—If hearts can house such treachery
They are not those who used to feed us
When we were young—they cannot be!

WINTER IN DURNOVER FIELD

SCENE.—A wide stretch of fallow ground recently sown with wheat, and frozen to iron hardness. Three large birds walking about thereon, and wistfully eyeing the surface. Wind keen from north-east: sky a dull grey.

(TRIOLET)

Rook.—Throughout the field I find no grain;
The cruel frost encrusts the cornland!
Starling.—Aye: patient pecking now is vain
Throughout the field, I find . . .
Rook.— No grain!

Pigeon.—Nor will be, comrade, till it rain,
Or genial thawings loose the lorn land
Throughout the field.
Rook.— I find no grain:
The cruel frost encrusts the cornland!

THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUM

WHY should this flower delay so long
To show its tremulous plumes?
Now is the time of plaintive robin-song,
When flowers are in their tombs.

Through the slow summer, when the sun
Called to each frond and whorl
That all he could for flowers was being done,
Why did it not uncurl?

It must have felt that fervid call
Although it took no heed,
Waking but now, when leaves like corpses fall,
And saps all retrocede.

Too late its beauty, lonely thing,
The season's shine is spent,
Nothing remains for it but shivering
In tempests turbulent.

Had it a reason for delay,
Dreaming in witlessness
That for a bloom so delicately gay
Winter would stay its stress?

—I talk as if the thing were born
With sense to work its mind;
Yet it is but one mask of many worn
By the Great Face behind.

THE DARKLING THRUSH

I LEANT upon a coppice gate
    When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
    The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
    Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
    Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
    The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
    The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
    Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
    Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
    The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
    Of joy illimited ;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small
    In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
    Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carollings
    Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
    Afar or nigh around,

That I could think there trembled through
    His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
    And I was unaware.

December 1900.

THE COMET AT YELL'HAM

I

IT bends far over Yell'ham Plain,
  And we, from Yell'ham Height,
Stand and regard its fiery train,
  So soon to swim from sight.

II

It will return long years hence, when
  As now its strange swift shine
Will fall on Yell'ham ; but not then
  On that sweet form of thine.

MAD JUDY

WHEN the hamlet hailed a birth
Judy used to cry:
When she heard our christening mirth
She would kneel and sigh.
She was crazed, we knew, and we
Humoured her infirmity.

When the daughters and the sons
  Gathered them to wed,
And we like-intending ones
  Danced till dawn was red,
She would rock and mutter, "More
Comers to this stony shore!"

When old Headsman Death laid hands
  On a babe or twain,
She would feast, and by her brands
  Sing her songs again.
What she liked we let her do,
Judy was insane, we knew.

A WASTED ILLNESS

THROUGH vaults of pain,
Enribbed and wrought with groins of ghastliness,
I passed, and garish spectres moved my brain
To dire distress.

And hammerings,
And quakes, and shoots, and stifling hotness, blent
With webby waxing things and waning things
As on I went.

"Where lies the end
To this foul way?" I asked with weakening breath.
Thereon ahead I saw a door extend—
The door to death.

It loomed more clear:
"At last!" I cried. "The all-delivering door!"
And then, I knew not how, it grew less near
Than theretofore.

And back slid I
Along the galleries by which I came,
And tediously the day returned, and sky,
And life—the same.

And all was well:
Old circumstance resumed its former show,
And on my head the dews of comfort fell
As ere my woe.

I roam anew,
Scarce conscious of my late distress. . . . And yet

Those backward steps through pain I cannot
view
Without regret.

For that dire train
Of waxing shapes and waning, passed before,
And those grim aisles, must be traversed again
To reach that door.

A MAN

(IN MEMORY OF H. OF M.)

I

IN Casterbridge there stood a noble pile,
Wrought with pilaster, bay, and balus-
trade
In tactful times when shrewd Eliza swayed.—
On burgher, squire, and clown
It smiled the long street down for near a mile

II

But evil days beset that domicile ;
The stately beauties of its roof and wall
Passed into sordid hands. Condemned to
fall
Were cornice, quoin, and cove,
And all that art had wove in antique style.

III

Among the hired dismantlers entered there
One till the moment of his task untold.
When charged therewith he gazed, and
answered bold :
" Be needy I or no,
I will not help lay low a house so fair !

IV

" Hunger is hard. But since the terms be
such—
No wage, or labour stained with the dis-
grace

Of wrecking what our age cannot replace
To save its tasteless soul—
I'll do without your dole. Life is not much!"

V

Dismissed with sneers he backed his tools and went,
And wandered workless; for it seemed unwise
To close with one who dared to criticize
And carp on points of taste:
To work where they were placed rude men were meant.

VI

Years whiled. He aged, sank, sickened, and was not:
And it was said, "A man intractable
And curst is gone." None sighed to hear his knell,
None sought his churchyard-place;
His name, his rugged face, were soon forgot.

VII

The stones of that fair hall lie far and wide,
And but a few recall its ancient mould;
Yet when I pass the spot I long to hold
As truth what fancy saith:
"His protest lives where deathless things abide!"

THE DAME OF ATHELHALL

I

"SOUL! Shall I see thy face," she said,
"In one brief hour?
And away with thee from a loveless bed
To a far-off sun, to a vine-wrapt bower,
And be thine own unseparated,
And challenge the world's white glower?"

II

She quickened her feet, and met him where
They had predesigned:
And they clasped, and mounted, and cleft the air
Upon whirling wheels; till the will to bind
Her life with his made the moments there
Efface the years behind.

III

Miles slid, and the sight of the port upgrew
As they sped on;
When slipping its bond the bracelet flew
From her fondled arm. Replaced anon,
Its cameo of the abjured one drew
Her musings thereupon.

IV

The gaud with his image once had been
A gift from him:
And so it was that its carving keen
Refurbished memories wearing dim,
Which set in her soul a throe of teen,
And a tear on her lashes' brim.

V

"I may not go!" she at length upspake,
"Thoughts call me back—
I would still lose all for your dear, dear sake;
My heart is thine, friend! But my track
I home to Athelhall must take
To hinder household wrack!"

VI

He appealed. But they parted, weak and wan;
And he left the shore;
His ship diminished, was low, was gone;
And she heard in the waves as the daytide wore,
And read in the leer of the sun that shone,
That they parted for evermore.

VII

She homed as she came, at the dip of eve
On Athel Coomb
Regaining the Hall she had sworn to leave . . .
The house was soundless as a tomb,
And she entered her chamber, there to grieve
Lone, kneeling, in the gloom.

VIII

From the lawn without rose her husband's voice
To one his friend:
"Another her Love, another my choice,
Her going is good. Our conditions mend;
In a change of mates we shall both rejoice;
I hoped that it thus might end!

IX

"A quick divorce; she will make him hers,
And I wed mine.
So Time rights all things in long, long years—
Or rather she, by her bold design!
I admire a woman no balk deters:
She has blessed my life, in fine.

X

"I shall build new rooms for my new true bride,
Let the bygone be:
By now, no doubt, she has crossed the tide
With the man to her mind. Far happier she
In some warm vineland by his side
Than ever she was with me."

THE SEASONS OF HER YEAR

I

WINTER is white on turf and tree,
And birds are fled;
But summer songsters pipe to me,
And petals spread,
For what I dreamt of secretly
His lips have said!

II

O 'tis a fine May morn, they say,
And blooms have blown ;
But wild and wintry is my day,
My songbirds moan ;
For he who vowed leaves me to pay
Alone—alone !

THE MILKMAID

UNDER a daisied bank
    There stands a rich red ruminating cow,
  And hard against her flank
A cotton-hooded milkmaid bends her brow.

  The flowery river-ooze
Upheaves and falls; the milk purrs in the pail;
  Few pilgrims but would choose
The peace of such a life in such a vale.

The maid breathes words—to vent,
It seems, her sense of Nature's scenery,
Of whose life, sentiment,
And essence, very part itself is she.

She bends a glance of pain,
And, at a moment, lets escape a tear;
Is it that passing train,
Whose alien whirr offends her country ear?—

Nay! Phyllis does not dwell
On visual and familiar things like these;
What moves her is the spell
Of inner themes and inner poetries:

Could but by Sunday morn
Her gay new gown come, meads might dry to dun,
Trains shriek till ears were torn,
If Fred would not prefer that Other One.

THE LEVELLED CHURCHYARD

"O PASSENGER, pray list and catch
Our sighs and piteous groans,
Half stifled in this jumbled patch
Of wrenched memorial stones!

"We late-lamented, resting here,
Are mixed to human jam,
And each to each exclaims in fear,
'I know not which I am!'

"The wicked people have annexed
The verses on the good;
A roaring drunkard sports the text
Teetotal Tommy should!

"Where we are huddled none can trace,
And if our names remain,
They pave some path or porch or place
Where we have never lain!

"There's not a modest maiden elf
But dreads the final Trumpet,
Lest half of her should rise herself,
And half some sturdy strumpet!

"From restorations of Thy fane,
From smoothings of Thy sward,
From zealous Churchmen's pick and plane
Deliver us O Lord! Amen!"

1882.

THE RUINED MAID

"O'MELIA, my dear, this does every-
thing crown!
Who could have supposed I should meet you
in Town?
And whence such fair garments, such pros-
peri-ty?"—
"O didn't you know I'd been ruined?" said
she.

—"You left us in tatters, without shoes or
socks,
Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up
docks;
And now you've gay bracelets and bright
feathers three!"—
"Yes: that's how we dress when we're ruined,"
said she.

—"At home in the barton you said 'thee'
and 'thou,'
And 'thik oon,' and 'theäs oon,' and 't'other':
but now
Your talking quite fits 'ee for high com-
pa-ny!"—
"Some polish is gained with one's ruin," said
she.

—"Your hands were like paws then, your
face blue and bleak,
But now I'm bewitched by your delicate cheek,
And your little gloves fit as on any la-dy!"—
"We never do work when we're ruined," said
she.

—"You used to call home-life a hag-ridden
dream,
And you'd sigh, and you'd sock; but at
present you seem
To know not of megrims or melancho-ly!"—
"True. There's an advantage in ruin," said
she.

—"I wish I had feathers, a fine sweeping gown,
And a delicate face, and could strut about
Town!"—
"My dear—a raw country girl, such as you
be,
Isn't equal to that. You ain't ruined," said she.

WESTBOURNE PARK VILLAS, 1866.

THE RESPECTABLE BURGHER

ON "THE HIGHER CRITICISM"

SINCE Reverend Doctors now declare
That clerks and people must prepare
To doubt if Adam ever were;
To hold the flood a local scare;
To argue, though the stolid stare,
That everything had happened ere
The prophets to its happening sware;
That David was no giant-slayer,
Nor one to call a God-obeyer

In certain details we could spare,
But rather was a debonair
Shrewd bandit, skilled as banjo-player:
That Solomon sang the fleshly Fair,
And gave the Church no thought whate'er;
That Esther with her royal wear,
And Mordecai, the son of Jair,
And Joshua's triumphs, Job's despair,
And Balaam's ass's bitter blare;
Nebuchadnezzar's furnace-flare,
And Daniel and the den affair,
And other stories rich and rare,
Were writ to make old doctrine wear
Something of a romantic air:
That the Nain widow's only heir,
And Lazarus with cadaverous glare
(As done in oils by Piombo's care)
Did not return from Sheol's lair:
That Jael set a fiendish snare,
That Pontius Pilate acted square,
That never a sword cut Malchus' ear
And (but for shame I must forbear)
That —— —— did not reappear! . . .

—Since thus they hint, nor turn a hair,
All churchgoing will I forswear,
And sit on Sundays in my chair,
And read that moderate man Voltaire.

ARCHITECTURAL MASKS

I

THERE is a house with ivied walls,
And mullioned windows worn and old,
And the long dwellers in those halls
Have souls that know but sordid calls,
And daily dote on gold.

II

In blazing brick and plated show
Not far away a "villa" gleams,
And here a family few may know,
With book and pencil, viol and bow,
Lead inner lives of dreams.

III

The philosophic passers say,
"See that old mansion mossed and fair,
Poetic souls therein are they :
And O that gaudy box ! Away,
You vulgar people there."

THE TENANT-FOR-LIFE

THE sun said, watching my watering-pot
"Some morn you'll pass away;
These flowers and plants I parch up hot—
Who'll water them that day?

"Those banks and beds whose shape your eye
Has planned in line so true,
New hands will change, unreasoning why
Such shape seemed best to you.

"Within your house will strangers sit,
And wonder how first it came;
They'll talk of their schemes for improving it,
And will not mention your name.

"They'll care not how, or when, or at what
You sighed, laughed, suffered here,
Though you feel more in an hour of the spot
Than they will feel in a year

"As I look on at you here, now,
Shall I look on at these;
But as to our old times, avow
No knowledge—hold my peace! . . .

"O friend, it matters not, I say;
Bethink ye, I have shined
On nobler ones than you, and they
Are dead men out of mind!"

THE KING'S EXPERIMENT

IT was a wet wan hour in spring,
And Nature met King Doom beside a lane,
Wherein Hodge tramped, all blithely ballading
The Mother's smiling reign.

"Why warbles he that skies are fair
And coombs alight," she cried, "and fallows gay,
When I have placed no sunshine in the air
Or glow on earth to-day?"

"'Tis in the comedy of things
That such should be," returned the one of Doom;
"Charge now the scene with brightest blazonings,
And he shall call them gloom."

She gave the word: the sun outbroke,
All Froomside shone, the hedgebirds raised a strain;
And later Hodge, upon the midday stroke,
Returned along the lane,

Low murmuring: "O this bitter scene,
And thrice accurst horizon hung with gloom!
How deadly like this sky, these fields, these treen,
To trappings of the tomb!"

The Beldame then: "The fool and blind!
Such mad perverseness who may apprehend?"—

"Nay; there's no madness in it; thou shalt find
Thy law there," said her friend.

"When Hodge went forth 'twas to his Love,
To make her, ere this eve, his wedded prize,
And Earth, despite the heaviness above,
Was bright as Paradise.

"But I sent on my messenger,
With cunning arrows poisonous and keen,
To take forthwith her laughing life from her,
And dull her little een,

"And white her cheek, and still her breath,
Ere her too buoyant Hodge had reached her side;
So, when he came, he clasped her but in death,
And never as his bride.

"And there's the humour, as I said;
Thy dreary dawn he saw as gleaming gold,
And in thy glistening green and radiant red
Funereal gloom and cold."

THE TREE

AN OLD MAN'S STORY

I

ITS roots are bristling in the air
Like some mad Earth-god's spiny hair;
The loud south-wester's swell and yell
Smote it at midnight, and it fell.
Thus ends the tree
Where Some One sat with me.

II

Its boughs, which none but darers trod,
A child may step on from the sod,
And twigs that earliest met the dawn
Are lit the last upon the lawn.
        Cart off the tree
        Beneath whose trunk sat we!

III

Yes, there we sat: she cooed content,
And bats ringed round, and daylight went;
The gnarl, our seat, is wrenched and sunk,
Prone that queer pocket in the trunk
        Where lay the key
        To her pale mystery.

IV

"Years back, within this pocket-hole
I found, my Love, a hurried scrawl
Meant not for me," at length said I;
"I glanced thereat, and let it lie:
        The words were three—
        '*Beloved, I agree.*'

V

"Who placed it here; to what request
It gave assent, I never guessed.
Some prayer of some hot heart, no doubt,
To some coy maiden hereabout,
Just as, maybe,
With you, Sweet Heart, and me."

VI

She waited, till with quickened breath
She spoke, as one who banisheth
Reserves that lovecraft heeds so well,
To ease some mighty wish to tell:
"'Twas I," said she,
"Who wrote thus clinchingly.

VII

"My lover's wife—aye, wife!—knew nought
Of what we felt, and bore, and thought. . . .
He'd said: '*I wed with thee or die:*
She stands between, 'tis true. But why?
Do thou agree,
And—she shall cease to be.'

VIII

"How I held back, how love supreme
Involved me madly in his scheme
Why should I say? . . . I wrote assent
(You found it hid) to his intent. . . .
She—*died*. . . . But he
Came not to wed with me.

IX

"O shrink not, Love!—Had these eyes seen
But once thine own, such had not been!
But we were strangers. . . . Thus the plot
Cleared passion's path.—Why came he not
To wed with me? . . .
He wived the gibbet-tree."

X

—Under that oak of heretofore
Sat Sweetheart mine with me no more:
By many a Fiord, and Strom, and Fleuve
Have I since wandered. . . . Soon, for love,
Distraught went she—
'Twas said for love of me.

HER LATE HUSBAND

(KING'S-HINTOCK, 182–.)

"NO—not where I shall make my own;
But dig his grave just by
The woman's with the initialed stone—
As near as he can lie—
After whose death he seemed to ail,
Though none considered why.

"And when I also claim a nook,
And your feet tread me in,
Bestow me, under my old name,
Among my kith and kin,

That strangers gazing may not dream
    I did a husband win."

"Widow, your wish shall be obeyed;
    Though, thought I, certainly
You'd lay him where your folk are laid,
    And your grave, too, will be,
As custom hath it; you to right,
    And on the left hand he."

"Aye, sexton; such the Hintock rule,
    And none has said it nay;
But now it haps a native here
    Eschews that ancient way...
And it may be, some Christmas night,
    When angels walk, they'll say:

"'O strange interment! Civilized lands
    Afford few types thereof;
Here is a man who takes his rest
    Beside his very Love,
Beside the one who was his wife
    In our sight up above!'"

THE SELF-UNSEEING

HERE is the ancient floor,
Footworn and hollowed and thin,
Here was the former door
Where the dead feet walked in.

She sat here in her chair,
Smiling into the fire;
He who played stood there,
Bowing it higher and higher.

Childlike, I danced in a dream;
Blessings emblazoned that day;
Everything glowed with a gleam;
Yet we were looking away!

IN TENEBRIS

I

"Percussus sum sicut foenum, et aruit cor meum."

—*Ps.* ci.

WINTERTIME nighs;
But my bereavement-pain
It cannot bring again:
Twice no one dies.

Flower-petals flee ;
But, since it once hath been,
No more that severing scene
Can harrow me.

Birds faint in dread :
I shall not lose old strength
In the lone frost's black length :
Strength long since fled !

Leaves freeze to dun ;
But friends can not turn cold
This season as of old
For him with none.

Tempests may scath ;
But love can not make smart
Again this year his heart
Who no heart hath.

Black is night's cope ;
But death will not appal
One who, past doubtings all,
Waits in unhope.

IN TENEBRIS

II

"Considerabam ad dexteram, et videbam; et non erat qui cognosceret me. . . . Non est qui requirat animam meam."—*Ps.* cxli.

WHEN the clouds' swoln bosoms echo
back the shouts of the many and
strong
That things are all as they best may be, save a
few to be right ere long,

And my eyes have not the vision in them to
discern what to these is so clear,
The blot seems straightway in me alone ; one
better he were not here.

The stout upstanders say, All's well with us :
ruers have nought to rue !
And what the potent say so oft, can it fail to
be somewhat true ?
Breezily go they, breezily come ; their dust
smokes around their career,
Till I think I am one born out of due time,
who has no calling here.

Their dawns bring lusty joys, it seems ; their
evenings all that is sweet ;
Our times are blessed times, they cry : Life
shapes it as is most meet,
And nothing is much the matter ; there are
many smiles to a tear ;
Then what is the matter is I, I say. Why
should such an one be here ? . . .

Let him in whose ears the low-voiced Best
is killed by the clash of the First,
Who holds that if way to the Better there be, it
exacts a full look at the Worst,
Who feels that delight is a delicate growth
cramped by crookedness, custom, and fear,
Get him up and be gone as one shaped awry;
he disturbs the order here.

1895-96.

IN TENEBRIS

III

"Heu mihi, quia incolatus meus prolongatus est! Habitavi cum habitantibus Cedar; multum incola fuit anima mea."—*Ps.* cxix.

THERE have been times when I well
might have passed and the ending
have come—
Points in my path when the dark might have
stolen on me, artless, unrueing—

Ere I had learnt that the world was a welter
of futile doing :
Such had been times when I well might have
passed, and the ending have come !

Say, on the noon when the half-sunny hours
told that April was nigh,
And I upgathered and cast forth the snow
from the crocus-border,
Fashioned and furbished the soil into a
summer-seeming order,
Glowing in gladsome faith that I quickened
the year thereby.

Or on that loneliest of eves when afar and be-
nighted we stood,
She who upheld me and I, in the midmost
of Egdon together,
Confident I in her watching and ward through
the blackening heather,
Deeming her matchless in might and with
measureless scope endued.

Or on that winter-wild night when, reclined by
the chimney-nook quoin,
Slowly a drowse overgat me, the smallest and
feeblest of folk there,
Weak from my baptism of pain; when at
times and anon I awoke there—
Heard of a world wheeling on, with no listing
or longing to join.

Even then! while unweeting that vision could
vex or that knowledge could numb,
That sweets to the mouth in the belly are
bitter, and tart, and untoward,
Then, on some dim-coloured scene should my
briefly raised curtain have lowered,
Then might the Voice that is law have said
"Cease!" and the ending have come.

1896.

THE CHURCH-BUILDER

I

THE church flings forth a battled shade
Over the moon-blanched sward;
The church; my gift; whereto I paid
My all in hand and hoard;
Lavished my gains
With stintless pains
To glorify the Lord.

II

I squared the broad foundations in
Of ashlared masonry ;
I moulded mullions thick and thin,
Hewed fillet and ogee :
I circleted
Each sculptured head
With nimb and canopy.

III

I called in many a craftsmaster
To fix emblazoned glass,
To figure Cross and Sepulchre
On dossal, boss, and brass.
My gold all spent,
My jewels went
To gem the cups of Mass.

IV

I borrowed deep to carve the screen
And raise the ivoried Rood ;
I parted with my small demesne
To make my owings good.

Heir-looms unpriced
I sacrificed,
Until debt-free I stood.

V

So closed the task. "Deathless the Creed
Here substanced!" said my soul:
"I heard me bidden to this deed,
And straight obeyed the call.
Illume this fane,
That not in vain
I build it, Lord of all!"

VI

But, as it chanced me, then and there
Did dire misfortunes burst;
My home went waste for lack of care,
My sons rebelled and curst;
Till I confessed
That aims the best
Were looking like the worst.

VII

Enkindled by my votive work
No burning faith I find;
The deeper thinkers sneer and smirk,
And give my toil no mind;
From nod and wink
I read they think
That I am fool and blind.

VIII

My gift to God seems futile, quite;
The world moves as erstwhile;
And powerful wrong on feeble right
Tramples in olden style.
My faith burns down,
I see no crown;
But Cares, and Griefs, and Guile.

IX

So now, the remedy? Yea, this:
I gently swing the door

Here, of my fane—no soul to wis—
And cross the patterned floor
To the rood-screen
That stands between
The nave and inner chore.

X

The rich red windows dim the moon,
But little light need I;
I mount the prie-dieu, lately hewn
From woods of rarest dye;
Then from below
My garment, so,
I draw this cord, and tie

XI

One end thereof around the beam
Midway 'twixt Cross and truss:
I noose the nethermost extreme,
And in ten seconds thus
I journey hence—
To that land whence
No rumour reaches us.

XII

Well: Here at morn they'll light on one
Dangling in mockery
Of what he spent his substance on
Blindly and uselessly! . . .
"He might," they'll say,
"Have built, some way,
A cheaper gallows-tree!"

THE LOST PYX

A MEDIÆVAL LEGEND[1]

SOME say the spot is banned; that the
 pillar Cross-and-Hand
Attests to a deed of hell;
But of else than of bale is the mystic tale
That ancient Vale-folk tell.

[1] On a lonely table-land above the Vale of Blackmore, between High-Stoy and Bubb-Down hills, and commanding in clear weather views that extend from the English to the Bristol Channel, stands a pillar, apparently mediæval, called Cross-and-Hand or Christ-in-Hand. Among other stories of its origin a local tradition preserves the one here given.

Ere Cernel's Abbey ceased hereabout there
dwelt a priest,
(In later life sub-prior
Of the brotherhood there, whose bones are
now bare
In the field that was Cernel choir).

One night in his cell at the foot of yon dell
The priest heard a frequent cry:
"Go, father, in haste to the cot on the waste,
And shrive a man waiting to die."

Said the priest in a shout to the caller without,
"The night howls, the tree-trunks bow;
One may barely by day track so rugged a way,
And can I then do so now?"

No further word from the dark was heard,
And the priest moved never a limb;
And he slept and dreamed; till a Visage seemed
To frown from Heaven at him.

In a sweat he arose; and the storm shrieked
shrill,
And smote as in savage joy;

While High-Stoy trees twanged to Bubb-Down
Hill,
And Bubb-Down to High-Stoy.

There seemed not a holy thing in hail,
Nor shape of light or love,
From the Abbey north of Blackmore Vale
To the Abbey south thereof.

Yet he plodded thence through the dark
immense,
And with many a stumbling stride
Through copse and briar climbed nigh and
nigher
To the cot and the sick man's side.

When he would have unslung the Vessels
uphung
To his arm in the steep ascent,
He made loud moan: the Pyx was gone
Of the Blessed Sacrament.

Then in dolorous dread he beat his head:
"No earthly prize or pelf
Is the thing I've lost in tempest tossed,
But the Body of Christ Himself!"

He thought of the Visage his dream revealed,
And turned towards whence he came,
Hands groping the ground along foot-track and field,
And head in a heat of shame.

Till here on the hill, betwixt vill and vill,
He noted a clear straight ray
Stretching down from the sky to a spot hard by,
Which shone with the light of day.

And gathered around the illumined ground
Were common beasts and rare,
All kneeling at gaze, and in pause profound
Attent on an object there.

'Twas the Pyx, unharmed 'mid the circling rows
Of Blackmore's hairy throng,
Whereof were oxen, sheep, and does,
And hares from the brakes among;

And badgers grey, and conies keen,
And squirrels of the tree,
And many a member seldom seen
Of Nature's family.

The ireful winds that scoured and swept
Through coppice, clump, and dell,
Within that holy circle slept
Calm as in hermit's cell.

Then the priest bent likewise to the sod
And thanked the Lord of Love,
And Blessed Mary, Mother of God,
And all the saints above.

And turning straight with his priceless freight,
He reached the dying one,
Whose passing sprite had been stayed for the rite
Without which bliss hath none.

And when by grace the priest won place,
And served the Abbey well,
He reared this stone to mark where shone
That midnight miracle.

TESS'S LAMENT

I

I WOULD that folk forgot me quite,
Forgot me quite!
I would that I could shrink from sight,
And no more see the sun.
Would it were time to say farewell,
To claim my nook, to need my knell,
Time for them all to stand and tell
Of my day's work as done.

II

Ah! dairy where I lived so long,
I lived so long;
Where I would rise up stanch and strong,
And lie down hopefully.
'Twas there within the chimney-seat
He watched me to the clock's slow beat—
Loved me, and learnt to call me sweet,
And whispered words to me.

III

And now he's gone; and now he's gone; . . .
And now he's gone!
The flowers we potted p'rhaps are thrown
To rot upon the farm.
And where we had our supper-fire
May now grow nettle, dock, and briar,
And all the place be mould and mire
So cozy once and warm.

IV

And it was I who did it all,
Who did it all;
'Twas I who made the blow to fall

On him who thought no guile.
Well, it is finished—past, and he
Has left me to my misery,
And I must take my Cross on me
For wronging him awhile.

V

How gay we looked that day we wed,
That day we wed!
"May joy be with ye!" all o'm said
A standing by the durn.
I wonder what they say o's now,
And if they know my lot; and how
She feels who milks my favourite cow,
And takes my place at churn!

VI

It wears me out to think of it,
To think of it;
I cannot bear my fate as writ,
I'd have my life unbe;
Would turn my memory to a blot,
Make every relic of me rot,
My doings be as they were not,
And what they've brought to me!

THE SUPPLANTER

A TALE

I

HE bends his travel-tarnished feet
To where she wastes in clay:
From day-dawn until eve he fares
Along the wintry way;
From day-dawn until eve he bears
A wreath of blooms and bay.

II

"Are these the gravestone shapes that meet
My forward-straining view?
Or forms that cross a window-blind
In circle, knot, and queue:
Gay forms, that cross and whirl and wind
To music throbbing through?"—

III

"The Keeper of the Field of Tombs
Dwells by its gateway-pier;
He celebrates with feast and dance
His daughter's twentieth year:
He celebrates with wine of France
The birthday of his dear."—

IV

"The gates are shut when evening glooms:
Lay down your wreath, sad wight;
To-morrow is a time more fit
For placing flowers aright:
The morning is the time for it;
Come, wake with us to-night!"—

V

He grounds his wreath, and enters in,
And sits, and shares their cheer.—
"I fain would foot with you, young man,
Before all others here;
I fain would foot it for a span
With such a cavalier!"

VI

She coaxes, clasps, nor fails to win
His first-unwilling hand:
The merry music strikes its staves,
The dancers quickly band;
And with the damsel of the graves
He duly takes his stand.

VII

"You dance divinely, stranger swain,
Such grace I've never known.
O longer stay! Breathe not adieu
And leave me here alone!
O longer stay: to her be true
Whose heart is all your own!"—

VIII

"I mark a phantom through the pane,
That beckons in despair,
Its mouth all drawn with heavy moan—
Her to whom once I sware!"—
"Nay; 'tis the lately carven stone
Of some strange girl laid there!"—

IX

"I see white flowers upon the floor
Betrodden to a clot;
My wreath were they?"—"Nay; love me much,
Swear you'll forget me not!
'Twas but a wreath! Full many such
Are brought here and forgot."

. . . . . .

X

The watches of the night grow hoar,
He wakens with the sun;
"Now could I kill thee here!" he says,
"For winning me from one
Who ever in her living days
Was pure as cloistered nun!"

XI

She cowers, and he takes his track
Afar for many a mile,
For evermore to be apart
From her who could beguile
His senses by her burning heart,
And win his love awhile.

XII

A year: and he is travelling back
To her who wastes in clay;
From day-dawn until eve he fares
Along the wintry way,
From day-dawn until eve repairs
Unto her mound to pray.

XIII

And there he sets him to fulfil
His frustrate first intent:
And lay upon her bed, at last,
The offering earlier meant:
When, on his stooping figure, ghast
And haggard eyes are bent.

XIV

"O surely for a little while
You can be kind to me!
For do you love her, do you hate,
She knows not—cares not she:
Only the living feel the weight
Of loveless misery!

XV

"I own my sin; I've paid its cost,
Being outcast, shamed, and bare:
I give you daily my whole heart,
Your child my tender care,
I pour you prayers; this life apart
Is more than I can bear!"

XVI

He turns—unpitying, passion-tossed;
"I know you not!" he cries,
"Nor know your child. I knew this maid,
But she's in Paradise!"
And he has vanished in the shade
From her beseeching eyes.

IMITATIONS, ETC.

SAPPHIC FRAGMENT

"Thou shalt be—Nothing."—OMAR KHAYYÁM.
"Tombless, with no remembrance."—W. SHAKESPEARE.

DEAD shalt thou lie; and nought
Be told of thee or thought,
For thou hast plucked not of the Muses' tree:
And even in Hades' halls
Amidst thy fellow-thralls
No friendly shade thy shade shall company!

CATULLUS: XXXI

(After passing Sirmione, April 1887.)

SIRMIO, thou dearest dear of strands
That Neptune strokes in lake and sea,
With what high joy from stranger lands
Doth thy old friend set foot on thee!
Yea, barely seems it true to me
That no Bithynia holds me now,
But calmly and assuringly
Around me stretchest homely Thou.

Is there a scene more sweet than when
Our clinging cares are undercast,
And, worn by alien moils and men,
The long untrodden sill repassed,
We press the pined for couch at last,
And find a full repayment there?
Then hail, sweet Sirmio; thou that wast,
And art, mine own unrivalled Fair!

AFTER SCHILLER

KNIGHT, a true sister-love
 This heart retains;
Ask me no other love,
 That way lie pains!

Calm must I view thee come,
 Calm see thee go;
Tale-telling tears of thine
 I must not know!

*   *   *   *

SONG FROM HEINE

I SCANNED her picture, dreaming,
Till each dear line and hue
Was imaged, to my seeming,
As if it lived anew.

Her lips began to borrow
Their former wondrous smile;

Her fair eyes, faint with sorrow,
Grew sparkling as erstwhile.

Such tears as often ran not
Ran then, my love, for thee;
And O, believe I cannot
That thou art lost to me!

FROM VICTOR HUGO

CHILD, were I king, I'd yield my royal
rule,
My chariot, sceptre, vassal-service due,
My crown, my porphyry-basined waters cool,
My fleets, whereto the sea is but a pool,
For a glance from you !

Love, were I God, the earth and its heaving
airs,
Angels, the demons abject under me,
Vast chaos with its teeming womby lairs,
Time, space, all would I give — aye, upper
spheres,
For a kiss from thee !

CARDINAL BEMBO'S EPITAPH ON RAPHAEL

HERE'S one in whom Nature feared—
faint at such vying—
Eclipse while he lived, and decease at his
dying.

RETROSPECT

I HAVE LIVED WITH SHADES"

I

I HAVE lived with shades so long,
And talked to them so oft,
Since forth from cot and croft
I went mankind among,
That sometimes they
In their dim style
Will pause awhile
To hear my say;

II

And take me by the hand,
And lead me through their rooms
In the To-be, where Dooms
Half-wove and shapeless stand:
        And show from there
        The dwindled dust
        And rot and rust
        Of things that were.

III

"Now turn," they said to me
One day: "Look whence we came
And signify his name
Who gazes thence at thee."—
        —"Nor name nor race
        Know I, or can,"
        I said, "Of man
        So commonplace.

IV

"He moves me not at all;
I note no ray or jot

Of rareness in his lot,
Or star exceptional.
Into the dim
Dead throngs around
He'll sink, nor sound
Be left of him."

V

"Yet," said they, "his frail speech,
Hath accents pitched like thine—
Thy mould and his define
A likeness each to each—
But go! Deep pain
Alas, would be
His name to thee,
And told in vain!"

Feb. 2, 1899.

MEMORY AND I

"O MEMORY, where is now my youth,
Who used to say that life was truth?"

"I saw him in a crumbled cot
  Beneath a tottering tree;
That he as phantom lingers there
  Is only known to me."

"O Memory, where is now my joy,
Who lived with me in sweet employ?"

"I saw him in gaunt gardens lone,
Where laughter used to be;
That he as phantom wanders there
Is known to none but me."

"O Memory, where is now my hope,
Who charged with deeds my skill and scope?"

"I saw her in a tomb of tomes,
Where dreams are wont to be;
That she as spectre haunteth there
Is only known to me."

"O Memory, where is now my faith,
One time a champion, now a wraith?"

"I saw her in a ravaged aisle,
Bowed down on bended knee:
That her poor ghost outflickers there
Is known to none but me."

"O Memory, where is now my love,
That rayed me as a god above?"

"I saw him by an ageing shape
  Where beauty used to be;
That his fond phantom lingers there
  Is only known to me."

'ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩι ΘΕΩι.

LONG have I framed weak phantasies of
Thee,
O Willer masked and dumb!
Who makest Life become,—
As though by labouring all-unknowingly,
Like one whom reveries numb.

How much of consciousness informs Thy will,
Thy biddings, as if blind,
Of death-inducing kind,
Nought shows to us ephemeral ones who fill
But moments in Thy mind.

Perhaps Thy ancient rote-restricted ways
Thy ripening rule transcends;
That listless effort tends
To grow percipient with advance of days,
And with percipience mends.

For, in unwonted purlieus, far and nigh,
At whiles or short or long,
May be discerned a wrong
Dying as of self-slaughter; whereat I
Would raise my voice in song.

THE END

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